PRACTICAL HINTS ON TRAINING FOR THE STAGE

AGNES PLATT

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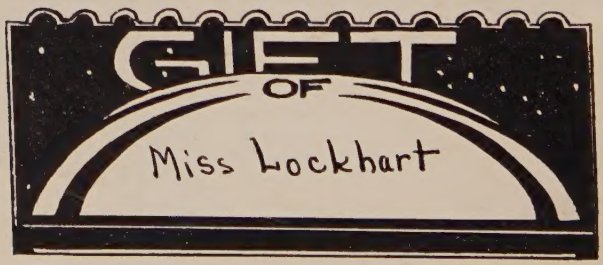
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Practical Hints
on
Training for the Stage

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Practical Stage Directing for Amateurs

A Handbook for Amateur Managers and Actors

By

Emerson Taylor

E. P. Dutton & Company

Practical Hints on Training for the Stage

By

Agnes Platt

Author of "Practical Hints on Playwriting," etc.

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GALILEO HIGH SCHOOL
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FOREWORD

THIS little book is merely an attempt to set down certain points of view which I have found helpful myself when coaching my stage pupils, whether novices or actors of some experience, who come for help in the interpretation of special rôles.

I have always found that the greater the actor, the more eager he is to have his work pulled to pieces. A critic may be at fault, but he does not take the trouble to criticize in detail unless he feels that the actor is going to be worth while, and that he has sufficient power within him to attain success in the end. It is for the actor himself to weigh the criticisms he receives, and to try to compare the effect his work has made on others with the aim he had in mind.

If this book serves the purpose of awakening in the minds of my readers a desire for

criticism and an instinct of self-judgment, I shall feel I have accomplished all that I set out to achieve.

AGNES PLATT

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Practical Hints
on
Training for the Stage

CALIFORNIA
SAN FRANCISCO, ...

PRACTICAL HINTS ON TRAINING FOR THE STAGE

CHAPTER I

THE WORK OF AN ACTOR. WHAT HE WILL HAVE TO FACE AND WHAT HE MAY ACHIEVE

THERE will always be a great deal of discussion as to whether acting is really an art. To my mind no one who has seen the work of a great actor can hesitate for a moment to answer this question in the affirmative. Acting is undoubtedly an art, and one which needs so many qualities to achieve a full result that the wonder is, not that there are so few great actors, but rather that there should be so many. Like every other art, it is possible to attain a certain degree of excellence without having genius, if one has observation, application and taste. I think it is because of this that people are apt to say

that acting is not an art, and also because acting is, in most cases, more interpretative than creative. But then, in the true sense of the world, all art is interpretative. The painter paints from life, the author writes the lessons he has learnt from life. Even the greatest work of the musician is his attempt to speak in music the message life has sent him.

What is creation, and how does it differ from interpretation? Both author and actor interpret from the book of Nature according to their lights. We may fancy that we have original ideas, and that our work expresses them, and it is certainly true that some of us have infinitely more independence of outlook than others; but it does not follow that because we are interpreting we are necessarily laying aside our originality. On the contrary one needs great originality to interpret with illumination; for if one lacks originality oneself, one will never be able to appreciate the originality of others. An actor of commonplace mind can only give a commonplace interpretation; but an actor of original mind will cast the light of his own genius over the

work of his author, and by understanding to the full the meaning of that author, and the possibilities of his part, will make of the character he plays an outstanding bit of life, true in itself, and true also in its relation to the whole play. When reading an author's work with a view to acting, one has got to see, not only what the author has actually written, but all that he wanted to convey and all that he might have conveyed, had his genius been of the first water. It is here that an actor whose genius *is* of the first water supplies a fuller and more satisfying interpretation, and thereby raises his calling to the level of a high art.

There is a constant feud between actors and authors, due sometimes to a kind of jealousy. An actor who approaches his work with a grudge in his heart that the author may get the credit of his brains is a man who is not fitted for his profession. Perhaps in no art is there so much risk of being blamed for other people's faults as in the art of acting. The critics themselves do not always know how to apportion praise and blame, and will slate an author for a fault

which is due to the producer or to the inequality of the cast. For this reason many dramatic criticisms, even though true of the *ensemble,* are unjust in detail. Unless you have read the original text of a play it is almost impossible, on viewing the production of that play, to say where the work of the author ends and the work of the producer and the individual actors begins. The fact is that author and actor are coöperating—or should be coöperating loyally—to produce a common effect. United they stand, divided they fall.

Even in so small a matter as that of forgetting one's lines upon the stage the injustice of stage conditions makes itself felt. It is not the actor who "dries up" who seems in fault, but his companion on the stage who, because he has not received his cue, is unable to continue the dialogue.

The whole art of acting is the art of give and take. You have to view your part in relation to the whole, and it is a duty to refrain from making any special effect which is going to distract the attention of the audience from other actors and concentrate it

upon yourself. No actor may look at his part from a selfish point of view. He must always be willing to give up his own tit-bit if the well-being of the whole performance demand it.

Moreover, from first to last, his own personal feelings must be rigorously set aside. Whatever his private troubles or joys, he must oust them from his mind completely while doing his work. For the time being he has to become an entirely different man. He must learn to wait, he must learn to adapt himself, he must learn to take sharp criticism straight from the shoulder in front of his fellow actors. He must learn to look on his face and other attributes merely as assets to his work, and must get rid, once and for all, of all personal vanity. He must learn that his own triumph will never be really great unless it is shared by the other members of the cast and above all by the author.

For many centuries the stage has been looked upon as a sink of iniquity. Viewed rightly, acting is essentially a profession which brings out the best that is in us. An actor depends for his success on a keenly de-

veloped observation and sympathetic understanding of human character. He will never succeed with audiences unless he has the faculty of making himself liked, which means that he must rid himself of all such annoying traits as conceit, self-consciousness, obstinacy, aggressiveness, irritability and "swank"; for all these qualities leave their mark on a man and show in his face and manner. One will never please an audience unless one has a great desire to please, and this desire is not found in company with smug self-satisfaction.

Suggestion plays a great part on the stage, and unless an actor is himself sincere he will never suggest sincerity in his work. Only earnestness is convincing. Unless he is unselfish he will spoil the effect of many a scene because he will grudge to his fellow actors in that scene their predominance at certain vital moments. Unless he is devoted to his work he will never stand the nervous strain it entails. Unless he carries the thought of his work very close to his heart he will go through life with his eyes shut and lose the

advantage of all the lessons which life alone can teach.

Since, more than any other art, acting is the representation of life by the living human being, it is obvious that a study of life and character is essential. To the actor, above all men, every human trait should speak, every vibration from his fellow beings tell its own story. One must keep oneself always sensitive to the moods, needs and failings of others, and develop that sympathy which is the surest understanding.

Above all, the actor must learn to sustain the magnetic point of view. The *rapport* between actor and audience is very subtle and far too little understood. There are two ways of looking at everything, and to put a wrong view before the audience is to take upon oneself a great responsibility. An actor's mental philosophy is an important ingredient of his work. His whole art will be tinged by his personal outlook.

So much by way of motto to this little book. Now let us come down to practical matters. What exactly is the life of an ac-

tor? What does it demand from him, and how is he going to make good?

Say that an actor is engaged for a part. What happens? He is called to rehearsal, where the producer gives him his instructions as to the positions he is to occupy on the stage when speaking his lines. As the rehearsals progress, he is coached, more or less, in the business of his part and the necessary inflections. The first night comes. He does his best. The piece may, or may not, be a success. If it is, after a little more rehearsing for the various "cuts" which the first night's performance has probably shown to be necessary, his work, for some months to come, will consist in playing his part with probably little or no further rehearsing. Many people think that this makes the actor's life an easy one. But you have got to remember that the actor's hours take him on duty when the rest of the world is enjoying itself; that he is always subject to uncertainty, since every audience differs, and "points" that go well with one will fall flat with another; and that, therefore, an actor never really enjoys the nerve rest afforded by the routine

which forms an essential part of so many occupations.

The whole work of an actor entails a peculiar strain upon the nervous system. At rehearsals he is continually being called up and put through the discipline of a schoolboy. On the first night he is subject to an ordeal which some people could not bring themselves to face at all. And on each subsequent performance, though the ordeal is considerably less, still it is there, and makes itself felt whenever any little trifle goes wrong upon the stage. Remember, also, that his hours are not those which make for health. He cannot get his meals at normal times, and he has to work at night in a way that is exciting to the brain and detrimental to healthy sleep.

I have merely spoken so far of the stress of the work itself, but the greatest strain of all consists in procuring that work. Actor's engagements are all of a more or less precarious nature. The run of a piece may last for months, or it may come to an end after a few nights, and the whole anxiety of finding fresh work may begin all over again. It is

this uncertainty which tells so heavily on the nerves, far more than the actual nature of the work. The ups and downs of an actor's career demand a steady courage, a hopeful spirit and a level brain. The one bright spot is that, however dark things may seem, there is always the hope that fortune will suddenly appear, laden with smiles and favors. The temperament that can look facts in the face and say, "Well, any change, even for the worse, is still a change, and as such, preferable to monotony," is the temperament which is suited to the stage. The spirit at the back of such a temperament is the spirit strong enough to hypnotize an audience. Such a man has, in himself, the essence of magnetism, the quality which is always going to win.

Some actors will tell you that the stage is overcrowded. I think this means that, in common with most other occupations, it is besieged by a crowd of the wrong people. I am personally beset by girls who say to me:

"I am no good in an office, I am no good at housework, I am no good at anything; therefore, the only thing to do is to go on the stage. Please find me a part in London. I

would not mind if it were a small part, just to begin, you know."

These people rouse my ire. I consider it an insult to approach the stage from that point of view. But if you have a real sense of the stage, nothing on earth will keep you from it. Men and women alike will throw up comfortable berths and face any hardships just for the sake of the joy acting brings to them. Who shall say that they have not their reward? Is success or failure just a matter of pounds, shillings and pence? If the struggle is hard, it is none the less interesting, and a life of effort is infinitely better than stagnation.

On the other hand, the life of an actor has many compensations, such as cheery comradeship, the feeling that it does not matter even if you are poor because we have all been through it, and, whatever we may be, we are not snobs. It is our tradition that genius, to be worth while, must always go through the mill. Then even the fact that our engagements are sometimes short may have its compensating advantage. The one great drawback of the profession nowadays is that you

often have to face the deadly repetition of a long run; yet, again, if an actor suffers from this in one way, he gains in another. It gives him the chance to put by money, so that he no longer dreads a period of "resting"; and if he is really fond of his work he can get plenty of opportunities to relieve the tedium of playing one character night after night by offering to take part in charity matinées or any of those trial performances which, rightly handled, should add to his stage-craft. Moreover, the cinema supplies an actor with continual chances of fresh work.

Except in those rare cases where everything goes persistently against an actor (cases which one meets in every profession) an actor's life has many advantages, and its fascination is undeniable. The great thing is to go into it prepared to take what comes and not to be daunted by obstacles. If a thing is worth doing it is worth fighting for. If you can take that point of view you are fitted for the stage, because you have, at the back of you, the strength of character which will give you power over an audience. In short, you have the greatest of all gifts—Personality.

CHAPTER II

HOW TO APPLY THE INCIDENTS OF ONE'S DAILY LIFE TO ONE'S WORK

A STORY is told of Rachel, the great French actress, which is very striking. One day her younger sister rushed into her room, white with horror, and cried out:

"Father's dead!"

Rachel screamed and fainted. When at last consciousness returned to her, her first words were:

"I must remember that scream."

And in the next big tragic part she played she brought down the house when she screamed and fainted.

I have told that tale to many who have been shocked at what seemed to them the callousness of the great actress. They were wrong. Our art is a thing beyond us and above us, which calls and we obey. Everything that happens to us we put, consciously or unconsciously, into our work; and that

work stands or falls according to our power of assimilating the real meaning even of the most humdrum incidents of daily life. "He that hath eyes to see, let him see," is a golden maxim for the actor. Too often we go about with our eyes shut, observing nothing. A tree waves its branches in the wind, and we take it as an every-day occurrence, while the whole poetry of motion eludes us in those softly moving leaves. A dog darts towards us with loving cheeriness, and we brush him aside and think: "What a nuisance! He has muddied my clothes." If we watched, instead, the exquisite movements of that dog, the curving of his body, the delicate placing of his paws, if we noted the glow of his eyes, the stretching and relaxing of his lips, the tones of his various barks and, above all, the way he takes his breath when barking, we should learn a great deal about the art of acting. Dogs are born actors, and the technique of their art comes to them instinctively. Many of us recognize this, but very few realize that a dog is always thinking about something in his own doggy way, and that to watch him when he is unconsciously expressing his

thoughts is likely to be instructive. One can see those thoughts pass through his brain.

I remember at the Zoo watching a couple of young chimpanzees who were fondling one another. I noticed that while they chattered playfully and happily together, the corners of the lips were kept well forward, and the sounds they produced were softest music. They were using what singers know as the "forward tone." Then a quarrel arose between them. Taut went their snarling muscles, their lips were drawn back sharply, and their voices became shrill, harsh and unpleasant to a degree. There was a wealth of instruction to a singer or actor in this little scene, for the whole secret of musical and dramatic voice-use was there apparent. The lower animals are great instructors, both morally and artistically, if we would only watch them with humble hearts and try to understand. No actor need go farther than a dog's eyes for the kernel of facial expression.

The significance of sound is neglected here in England. As a rule we may study music, but it never enters our heads to reflect upon

the different sounds which belong to the every-day incidents of our customary life. Yet such apparent trifles as the singing of the kettle, the whisk of a broom over the floor, the rattle of dust-pan and brush, the clatter of the tongs, the soft, fine sounds as the table-cloth is swished from the table, all these apparent trifles act upon the nerves, and if we meditate upon them, we gradually find that we have got the key to a new kingdom and that a thousand things are becoming charged with meaning which before we simply failed to notice. Sound speaks to the imagination with a power the force of which is perhaps not fully realized until our other senses are dormant. During the daytime our eyes seem the immediate windows of our mind and keep us busy; but at night, when we are lying awake in the dark, sound holds her empire, and the slightest rustle for which we cannot immediately account will send a thrill of terror through our souls. When you are sitting alone, tired and a little unhappy, wondering how to face the trifling troubles with which this world is beset, have not you sometimes heard a little sound which touches a

chord, opens a little door in your brain, and out pops a treasured memory,—the thought of some friend with whom that little sound is associated; a bicycle bell, recalling a boy's joy at the gift of his first bicycle; or the click of your watch as you wind it up, reminding you of an old man who once stood, with his back to the fire, twisting the winder of his watch as he talked to you, and called you his "dear child." It is just one little thing which brings before our eyes the whole picture.

Though we think we can all see, yet even our faculty of seeing is capable, so to speak, of infinite cultivation. It is one thing to see; another thing to notice; and yet a third thing to understand. Ask any of your friends to describe some one you both know. How much will that description really convey? Shut your eyes and see with the "eye of the brain"—the eye of memory; and the first thing of which you will be aware will be some characteristic attitude of the man you want to describe, some little habit or mannerism which has remained in your memory as a sign-manual of that man. That is where the gift of observation comes in; it is not so much a

question of observing everything as of selecting from what you observe the things that matter. In other words, observation in itself is nothing. One must discriminate and judge. Accurately noted and tested observation is the whole secret of correct interpretation.

It has often been said that art is a matter of selection; this is perfectly true, and it is with a view to making our selection vividly individual that we must cultivate the habit of seeing everything. So many people say to me:

"I don't want to hear what other people think, in case I only echo what they say."

This seems to me a short-sighted policy. No wise person will express an opinion on a subject that he does not understand, and you cannot gain a true understanding of any subject unless you have looked at it from many points of view. To hear the opinions of others cannot hamper, but may probably do good, and no one of real individuality need fear undue influence. The danger for him is that he may narrow down into self-opinionated obstinacy. No one can afford to ignore other people, least of all the actor, whose

work it is to bring the character of others into sympathetic being.

My advice to every actor would be that he should try to get at the inner reasons of the opinions and characteristics of all about him; never content himself with an obvious interpretation and, above all, never condemn. You can only learn if you put yourself in the place of the person you are studying, and feel, for the moment, all that secret longing to be understood and not to be blamed, not to have to blame yourself, which is buried in the heart of every human being, but which is only voiced at those sacred moments when fate has broken down all barriers, and brought us face to face with our bare soul. We all make excuses for ourselves, for if we did not we could not bear the scathing light of self-condemnation. Let the actor studying humanity start by seeing these excuses and accepting them. Let him feel when dissecting others as if he were himself being dissected, and he will find at the bottom of every heart the spark that is trying to fly upwards; the touch of human nature which is the soul of art, because it is the call of our

common brotherhood. When he has taught himself to look at others from this point of view, he will quickly learn to summarize the salient traits of any character he wishes to present in such a way that his performance will have so much impressionistic truth that it will carry with it conviction. Even when the balance of the play demands that he shall bring out the ugliest qualities of the character he is playing, yet he can present them in such a way that their very force will make us feel the truth of the old saying that "evil is merely the converse of good" and we shall know that it is environment which is to blame, and that humanity itself is not discredited by this representation of a human being.

The small, the trifling, the weak; there are two ways of looking at all these things, the way that debases and the way that makes clear the inner meaning. To be shown an ignoble view of life—this life which we human beings share—is depressing to us all, and to some natures it is even dangerous There is nothing so immoral as to take a low view of humanity, and when the stage lends itself to such an outlook the result is morbid.

Even when it is an actor's task to play a character of a poor type, he can represent the foibles of that character in such a way that they will at least deserve the epithet—human. This he can best learn to do if he studies the real human beings round about him; casts aside the temptation to judge by appearances and gets right down to the core of things. If his judgment of real life is good, his judgment as an actor will be good, and his work will be of the type which helps to ennoble the stage and to make of it that which it preëminently should be—an education.

CHAPTER III

THE VOICE AND ITS POTENTIALITIES

SINGERS speak of the "forward tone." It is the goal of their desire to possess the "forward tone," and they bend all their energies to acquire it. Many and various are the methods recommended to this end, and multitudinous are the ways in which they attempt to describe what the "forward tone" really means. I think the simplest way is to remind the student that when you want to throw your voice to an exceptional distance, you use a speaking trumpet. When you want to make your own voice carry to a distance without effort, the obvious method is to use your mouth as a speaking trumpet by a little manipulation of the lips. In the last chapter I referred to the way in which certain lower animals move the corners of the lips when talking in their various animal tongues. When they want to produce an offensive noise or a noise signifying annoyance, they stretch

the lips back; but when friendly or affectionate, when pleading with or cajoling their friends, they keep the corners of the lips well forward, and so produce what is known as the "forward tone." In other words, they are using the mouth in the form of a trumpet; and if the human being wishes to have a round, beautiful tone, he must also use his mouth in the form of a trumpet, so far as he can without making grimaces. It is the corners of the lips that matter. Do not stretch them back; get movement of the mouth by acquiring power over the muscles that control the center of each lip, so that they lift easily from over the front teeth without stretching away from the eye-teeth. Besides, this position makes the mouth look so much prettier, and when the smile comes it is the more striking because it is not continually suggested by the habit of keeping the lips with the corners drawn widely apart in a grinning position. If the lips are lifted in the center at the right times, and so kept well away from the teeth, the tone will be pure and the articulation clear. Nothing smothers articulation like a lip pressed down upon the teeth.

This muscular control can easily be acquired by any one who will watch himself in the glass for a few moments night and morning.

Another necessary rule in acquiring a pure, round tone is to keep the tongue well hollowed in the mouth; the tip and sides are raised to the teeth very, very lightly, but the center of the tongue should be hollowed downwards, so that the back of the throat can be clearly seen when the mouth is a little open. If the student stands before a glass and simply wills his tongue to lie down in this position for a few moments night and morning, he will soon find that he acquires control over the muscles of the tongue, and that it takes this position of its own accord. By this means a clear passage is allowed for the sound; but when, as is too often the case, the tongue is arched up like the back of an angry cat, it is acting as a sponge and the tone has to pass through it, which gives it that thick sound we know as "woolly." It also helps to bar the passage through the mouth and drives the tone up through the nose, especially if the soft palate is at all relaxed.

Whether you are training as a singer or

an actor, your voice will never last unless you use it as carefully and rightly in everyday life as you do when singing or acting. Many people who have ugly-speaking voices find that they have a good singing tone, and these people who have ugly speaking voices find throats. They don't realize that as they can get a beautiful tone when singing, it is obvious they can equally easily get a beautiful tone when speaking; that their ugly speaking voice is simply owing to false usage, and that this continual false usage must strain the throat and bring in its train those evils which always follow careless voice production. Therefore, to these people I say emphatically: Start your work of improvement on the voice that you use every day. Don't run away with the idea that for professional use you can acquire a different organ. It is the same organ differently used, and will never last unless it is rightly used both professionally and daily.

The higher notes of the speaking or singing voice are got by a tightening of the vocal chords in much the same way that the high notes of a violin are got by the tightening of

the violin string, and a continual use of these high notes makes a continual strain upon the vocal chords and muscles regulating them. Not only these muscles but that other set of muscles which lifts the larynx of the throat are kept in use exhaustingly by the constant reiteration of high sound; and it is, therefore, obvious that to speak on a lower note is infinitely more restful.

Many people have a nervous habit of tightening up the muscles of the throat and even those at the back of the neck when speaking, especially if they talk rapidly and excitedly. This nervous tension gives an edge to the voice, which affects the nerves still more, and so the evil increases and increases until the shrill and raucous tone is an irritation to themselves and to all about them.

Avoid undue strain of any sort. Speak restfully at all times unless the exigencies of the part you are playing demand otherwise.

The compass of the voice is one of its greatest beauties, and the compass of the speaking voice can be greatly increased by the use of a very simple exercise. Go to the piano, strike the middle E flat; speak a short

sentence on the tone corresponding to that note, then strike the semi-tone below and repeat the same sentence, then the semi-tone below again, and so on. Try this up and down on each semi-tone for a few moments every day until you have acquired the power of speaking easily on your highest as well as on your lowest tones. But be very sure that the speech is easy; don't let there be any straining; just talk naturally and simply, and listen to your own voice as you talk. Train your own ear to be a sure judge of your own utterance.

Louis Calvert, in his very interesting book, *Problems of an Actor,* lays great stress upon the importance of the consonants, and says in effect: take care of the consonants, and the vowels will take care of themselves. Now I do not agree with this at all. I even go the length of thinking that one of the reasons why modern actors are indistinct is that too much attention is paid to the consonants and too little to the vowels. Consonants are important, it is true, but most people sound their consonants correctly, whereas comparatively few use pure vowel sounds, though it

is upon the vowels that we depend for the music and the suggestion of our speech. What is the meaning of the word "vowel"? Vocal. Consonants are like gates shutting off our tone, but on the vowels we can dwell for a long or a short time as pleaseth us. This gives us the power of varying the pace at which we speak, and on this variety we depend for our most valuable dramatic effects. Monotony of any sort is deadly, and monotony of pace is the worst fault a speaker can commit. It reduces all he says to a jog-trot level. Besides, our vowels are so beautiful; our "o" especially, so characteristic of our race, rings out like a deep-toned bell. I cannot think of any other language with just its full, round sound. Its pure pronunciation, even here in England, is a sign-manual of breeding.

Surely vowels are worthy of a little trouble. Get into the habit of speaking every vowel with its due attention in every-day life, and you will soon find that people will compliment you on the carrying quality of your voice. If the vowels are jumped over and the consonants given undue prominence, the voice

always sounds hard. It fails to carry, moreover, because its traveling power depends on the vowel—that is on the *vocal* part of the words. You cannot sustain tone on any consonant without seeming affected or melodramatic. You depend for the even volume of the voice almost entirely on a pure and well delivered vowel.

Have you ever noticed how quick a dog is to learn the value of a vowel sound? Change a consonant, and it will not matter to him; change a vowel, and he will fail to understand you—a very significant proof of the importance of vowel sounds.

Evenness of volume is essential for good stage work. A speaker who lets down his little words so that they almost drop out of hearing conveys a jerky effect. Think of the tone of an organ, how it differs from that of a piano in its sustaining quality, and learn to sustain your tone so that every word you speak is clearly heard, and not merely the two or three opening words of a sentence.

Of course, one does not want to be affected, but if my injunction to speak in daily life with the same care that you would upon

the stage be heeded, there will be no affectation in clear speech. People who speak carelessly in every-day life and assume a careful utterance only for professional use always seem affected, because they are making a conscious effort the whole time they are on the stage. When articulation is habitually clear and the voice well used, correct speech becomes so characteristic of the speaker that it adds greatly to his personality.

The best way of acquiring pure vowel sounds is to start by speaking those vowels on which it is easiest to get the forward tone. These are "u" (oo), the English "o" and the foreign "o," which approximates to our "or." Speak these, then dwell on the sound, prolonging it into a singing tone. Having done this, say "ah" and try to get this in the same "forward" way. In other words, try to speak it with as little change as possible in the position of the lips and mouth from the position used in saying "or." Prolong the "ah" into a singing tone. Go carefully over these four sounds, sometimes singing, sometimes speaking them. Then take the other

pronunciations of "a" as in "an" and "rain." Treat these in the same manner. Then take "er" and the long "ee," then the short "e." This last will be difficult to get, but you can manage it if you put the "oo" sound in front. For instance, take the word "wet" and dwell a trifle on the "w," which is practically "oo." That "oo" sound may be used to help with all the vowels, as it is the most "forward" of any. When you have grasped the idea, viz., that every vowel has got to be spoken in the "forward tone," or in other words, with as little lapse as possible from the position of the mouth, tongue and lips which is used to pronounce the really "forward" vowels "oo," "o" and "or," a little practice will soon make perfect. Change from singing to speaking when practicing, and if you have a difficulty with any sound, say "or" and start all over again until you can get it.

With regard to the consonants, there are certain dramatic moments when they are very important, chiefly when an effect of tension is required. Much may be done by the way in which the initial consonant is pronounced.

A slight pause in front of the word, and then a push of the consonant will give drama to the word—

He is—*D*ead!

But nothing but melodrama will result from an over-stressing of the final consonant—

He is dead*de*!

The letter that starts the word may strike the key of the whole word, but the letter which finishes it should finish with the word. Indeed for ordinary usage it might be better if we English people bore in mind the rules of euphony instinctive among the French and Italians, and permitted that glide and *liaison* in certain cases which give such a musical charm to the Latin tongues.

Consonants really present little difficulty provided one can acquire the knack of giving the final consonant of a word sufficient importance without clicking it off too sharply in such a way that there seems to be a final "er" at the end of the word. I have heard over-careful speakers talk of "a greater deal" in-

stead of "a great deal" in their anxiety to give the "t" in "great" its value. To my mind that is a case where the foreign sense of euphony would have prescribed a *liaison*. Nothing is more irritating than to hear a final consonant delivered with a click which practically amounts to an extra syllable.

But it is not enough merely to speak clearly. The voice must express mood, feeling, passion; and those qualities demand a variety of tone.

To acquire this variety without becoming stereotyped is a difficult matter. Words learnt by heart and constantly repeated are apt to become stale and stiff to the beginner, and I find that for practice it is better to let my pupils use any words which come spontaneously to their minds. Take each emotion in turn; let us say, for example, that you start with Fear. You imagine to yourself that you hear some noise for which you cannot account, and gradually you realize that the sound implies a danger which is coming closer and closer. To express this you say any words that come into your head, as for instance:

"What's that? Was it thunder? No—it's not thunder! What can it be? I never heard a noise like that—what can it be? The floor is shaking! Was that a house falling down? The ground is rocking under my feet! It is an earthquake! Oh, my God!!"

Do not use the same words always or the same idea; vary it and vary also the intensity of the emotion. Remember that an extreme emotion is easier in a way to treat dramatically than a commonplace one, which requires delicacy and subtlety of expression to pick it out from a dead level of dullness.

Take another emotion, say Love:

"My dear, I love you. I don't know how to tell you; it is beyond words. When I hear your footsteps, when I feel the touch of your hand, it means so much to me that my heart beats. I worship you!"

In this way practice tone after tone, until by the mere use of tone, independently of facial expression, movement or stage setting, you can convey any feeling that you please.

A tone which it is most useful to acquire is that clear whisper which the French call

"haleine sans voix" (breath without voice), which means, of course, pure articulation without tone. This is the type of speech which deaf people hear with the greatest ease. We all think we can whisper, but not without a great deal of practice can we whisper loudly. Yet this knack, once acquired, is extremely useful on the stage. It would be impossible to play the murder scenes from *Macbeth* effectively without it.

Another of the emotions which should always be included in practice is Excitement; either the excitement of joy, or the excitement of suspense; because it can only be conveyed by rapid utterance. One often hears actors on the stage let down the big climax of a scene by slackening their pace just when it ought to quicken. Nothing excites an audience so much as quick speech, but it is an art to speak quickly and clearly, and it can only be done if the vowel sounds are pure and distinct. If you try to stress the consonants alone when speaking quickly, you will tie your tongue in knots; but if the vowel sounds, however short, have their full value of articulation, you can speak as quickly as you like and

know that what you say will be heard. The ordinary method of speaking quickly is to jump the little words together in such a way that it seems as though most of them were swallowed, as they do not sound at all. This is fatal; one must keep an even level of loudness, making the big words ring out beyond this again.

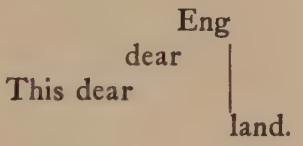
It is just as difficult to speak slowly as to speak quickly, and the most necessary thing of all is to *make the audience hear what you say*. As they will have most difficulty in doing this while your voice is strange to them, it is well to speak the opening lines of your part loudly, slowly and carefully. Later, when the listeners have got used to your voice, you can afford to hurry.

If only actors would learn to speak their final words on a circumflex inflection! Even when the last word is a two-syllabled one they speak both these syllables on a full stop—

This dear dear
England.

when surely it is obvious that the first of the

two should be on a higher note, and only the very last drop down to an end—



The whole secret of clear utterance lies in this little matter, and many a dull voice would become alive if only this one detail were carefully heeded.

Another frequent fault among English speakers is that we emphasize too many words. Although we often drop out our little words (articles, prepositions, conjunctions and even pronouns), we hit every noun, verb, adjective or adverb with an emphasis which does not really ring out, but produces a barrel-organny effect of grind, grind, grind. This is one reason why English actors are slow in speech and never acquire the pace of the foreign stage. Shut your eyes and imagine a Frenchman speaking. There will be a rush of words and then the key word of the whole sentence will ring out like a pistol

shot. Shut your eyes and imagine an Italian speaking, and you will be struck at once by the difference of pace in his pronunciation of the vowel sounds of words, even in one sentence; how quickly his liquid tongue slips over some, and how caressingly he dwells on others. It is this marked difference in the length of the vowel sounds which gives the peculiar music of Italian speech. An Italian, with his innate sense of drama, uses this even in every-day life. Both the Frenchman and the Italian have such a sense of the importance of the key word in every sentence that they make it stand out. So emphatic is it that even if one does not gather the sense of the other words, it carries the meaning of the whole sentence home. But we plod laboriously through our sentences. No one word stands out with the same vigor that a foreigner uses, yet our repeated emphases defeat their own object by familiarizing the ear with the continually recurring effect of emphasis which is yet not strong enough really to seize our attention. We all know that English spēech is more laborious than French or Italian, and this is partly why. It is a

pity, as in some ways our stage stands, to my mind, in front of any other, especially in the matter of careful detail. Yet that is sometimes the root of the evil. We are apt to overload our work with conscious effort, and in that way to obscure or miss that quick impression which drives home the one vital and important truth.

If Englishmen made a greater study of emotional changes of tone these faults in their speech would die away. We think too much of the words and too little of their meaning; yet it is only the meaning that matters and the words are merely its servants. That meaning can be expressed by emotional tone alone, without articulate words, if the actor has sufficient voice control. The cinema is teaching our actors a great deal. It is showing them the power of the eye, and how facial expression can stand alone, without the help of words. What I want to make clear at the moment is that, just as the cinema has taught us how much the face can express independently of words, so the speaking tone has also a wide range which our actors have not realized because we have not yet an art

form on the stage in which the speaking voice has to depend upon its tone alone, holding an audience without the aid of words. The wonderful resources of the voice have not yet been fully realized. The whole art of tone-painting is a closed book to many.

CHAPTER IV

THE MUSIC OF THE VOICE: ITS NOTES, POWER OF SUGGESTION AND MAGNETISM

THERE is usually much character in a voice. For my part, directly I hear any one speak I feel that I know a very great deal about the speaker. It is not always the most honeyed tones that give pleasure; for they, only too often, suggest insincerity. We are apt to distrust any one whose tone is always the same, because we feel it is assumed. It is the subtle changes that reveal character, and any one studying psychology should turn his attention closely to the subject of voice and its infinite detail: inflection, pronunciation, accent, music, intonation and variety. Everything about a voice tells its story, and that story is intricate and mainly to be read by intuition, which is in itself the result of sympathetic study. One ought to make one's voice as musical as one can merely for the sake of others, for an ugly voice will get upon

the nerves of the listeners and in some cases inflict real pain.

I had a blind friend once and wanted him to allow a girl I knew to go and read to him.

"Oh!" he said, "I couldn't; she has such a rasping voice!"

He winced as he spoke. Blind as he was, and fond of books as he was, he preferred to forego the pleasure rather than endure the torture that voice would have inflicted upon him.

It is a torture. I know that when I am very tired, over-worked, over-wrought in every way, if I have to speak to any one with a raucous voice I find it difficult to listen to what is said because my mind shrinks from the ugliness of the sound; and after such an interview I feel more exhausted than after a hard day's work. The nerve strain inflicted on others by an ugly voice is incalculable, and it is a duty for us all to make our voices as musical as we can. A little thought and care will do it; pure vowel sounds, consonants clear and not over-accentuated, variety of tone and musical inflections—that is all. These things can be acquired by practicing

night and morning for a few moments, and by a little thought all day and every day, when chatting to our friends. "Musical inflection"—that is the secret, and many people will ask how this is to be acquired. The answer lies in a nutshell—keep your ears open to the gifts which others have and say to yourself:

"Now, what is it that makes So-and-So speak so beautifully? Why do I come away from a short chat soothed and encouraged? It is not only what is said, but how it is said."

Then think—what is the secret of that intonation? The voice rose and fell; it tripped musically down the scale, climbed up by minute inflections. There was life and movement in the tone, a thousand subtle shades and gradations, difficult to express in words; but if we have listened with attention we can carry away a mental record, and that memory will serve as a future model.

Listen to the majority of speakers; they talk almost on one note and with one tone. Break up that monotony. Remember that variety of tone is got by a succession of the tiniest differences. There is no question of

the semi-tone interval between the notes of the speaking voice; the degrees of its scale are infinitely more minute. Listen! Listen to everything and everybody. When you meet a voice that seems to you full of character, copy it; and, as you mimic, notice what you are doing to get that tone; how you are placing your mouth, your lips, your tongue, and what is happening in your throat. If it is a raucous tone you are copying, you probably have to tighten up the muscles of the throat and feel an unpleasant sense of strain. If it is a beautiful tone, everything will be easy; you will not be conscious of any sensation in the throat, but you will feel the air playing about your lips as the tone comes forward. Mimic every one; give your voice all the practice possible in acquiring tone sounds, and you will soon learn to control it and to produce in every-day life exactly the tone which is most characteristic of you and of the thoughts and moods you wish to express.

All tone should be characteristic. Never imitate even the most perfect model so slavishly that you merely become its echo.

Practice mimicry just as an exercise, and choose fresh subjects as constantly as possible. You need not be limited to human voices. Any sound of nature will serve for practice. What you need is to acquire control of the resources of your own voice, and once you have done that, if you have any force of character, any initiative of your own, that character and that initiative will take advantage of the control you have acquired and use those resources to express your real self, without any further conscious effort on your part. In short, it will become second nature. But until you have learnt by listening to the voices of others and studying the intricate detail of inflection and intonation in every voice you hear, you will have no comprehension of the power of the human voice or of the meaning that lies stored there.

When speaking in dialect, inflection is even more important than pronunciation. James Welch used to say that if you spoke dialect parts on the stage too correctly the audience would not understand what you were saying, and that the secret was to get the pronunciation of certain words correctly, especially in

the opening lines, and always to keep the inflection characteristic. He contended, and I think rightly, that too great exactitude defeated its own object. Every county has its characteristic inflection. We all know the inability of the Welsh to come down to a full stop, and this sing-song is recognized as Welsh immediately, even when there is no accent discernible. In the same way inflection is important in handling character parts, even more important than tone. It is, to my mind, the surest test of breeding. A well-bred pronunciation is easy enough to acquire; but a well-bred inflection is much more subtle, in fact so subtle that many people are entirely unaware of it.

Each foreign country has its inflection. For many people broken English is broken English, and serves for any broken English part. But the inflection used by a Frenchman, Italian and German, when speaking English, differs. Again I can only say, as I have already said, listen and imitate; imitate every one and listen, not only to the pronunciation of each word, but to the recurring rhythm. When listening to the speech of

another, separate in your mind the pronunciation of the words from the inflection of the whole sentence, and form a clear idea of each, independently of the other. People from one district will differ in their pronunciation of single words partly because they will differ in class standing; but the characteristic inflection will be audible in some form or another in spite of class, in spite of education, in spite of travel. It is inherent and often ineradicable.

The way to catch an inflection is to hum it. Omit the words and get the musical rhythm of the spoken sentence. Do not run away with the idea that only those with a musical ear can catch this rhythm, and that only those so gifted can copy inflection. This is not so. The ear of the trained musician is accustomed to the intervals of our musical scale; but, as I have said before, the intervals of the speaking voice are infinitely more subtle, and any observer can note them and reproduce them provided he has acquired control over his voice. It is simply a matter of observation.

Character can be conveyed to the voice in a thousand ways. All sorts of tones can be ac-

quired by placing lips, tongue and teeth in different relative positions. Just experiment. Keep your upper lip down and take your lower lip a little off your lower teeth. Now, speak! What sort of voice do you get? Hard and thin and discontented, suggestive of the mood which your face expresses when your mouth is in that position. Now keep the lips a little together, and draw the corners back in a sort of artificial smile. Speak like that! Your voice is sibilantly sweet, of a thin quality, with no real heartiness behind it; superficial and suave. Now draw the lips a little back from the teeth and stretch them into a smile, and you get a touch of hissing which suggests the serpent. Clench the teeth a little, tighten the muscles of the tongue so that it is drawn back; pull down the lower lip; there is a menace in the tone; your whole face looks vindictive. Draw the tongue back again, and keep the upper lip down; tuck in your under-lip. You growl in your throat like a threatening lion; and you look, not vindictive, but dangerous. Then suppose you were happy and eager; your lips would be a little open, the corners forward; you would

pant slightly and the tone would be breathless and full of joyous expectation. In short, if you act with your whole face so that the mouth, that most expressive feature, falls into line with the mood you are expressing, the tone will follow of itself. Practice different tones, but be quite sure they are coming spontaneously, and that you are not contorting your features.

People who are putting on an expression so often get it in the eyes and upper part of the face and neglect the lower part altogether, which remains stiff and inexpressive. These people will never hit the right tone unless they deliberately assume that tone. In real life the mouth is the feature that gives us away before any other, and expression concentrates there and in the eyes. In real life, moreover, the tone always follows the expression as a matter of course. To what is this due? Simply to the fact that the nerves and muscles of the throat and mouth and the features of the face are under the dominance of the emotions and influence the tone. A born actor does this instinctively, and in training for the stage it is essential that all

emotion should dawn first in the eyes and on the face, and the words and tone will follow as a matter of course.

The quality of tone habitually used by most people is indicative of their normal character, and I have often marveled that managers casting plays do not pay more heed to the characteristic voices of the actors they choose. They are guided by appearance, or by the fact that they have seen the actor play a similar part before. They are sensible enough to know that a tall woman cannot play a love scene with a short man, and that it is better, if there are two young girls, that their coloring should contrast. But they never choose their cast with any idea of the blend of the speaking voices. I remember seeing one play—*The Wynmartins*—which depended upon the struggle between two women. The elder of the two had long dominated the younger (her son's wife), and the interest of the play turned on the young wife's struggle to cast off this tyranny and live in her own way. The two women were played by Agnes Thomas and Marie Tempest, and admirably played in many ways; yet

there was far too little suggestion of fight because Miss Tempest's voice was so penetrating and vibrant in quality that one never felt that Miss Thomas could have "downed" her. Though I greatly admire Miss Thomas in parts that suit her, when consulted about the casting of this play, I strongly urged Lady Tree for the part of the mother-in-law. She had, to my mind, exactly the quality of voice —sweetly, sibilantly insistent—which would stand against Marie Tempest's.

Miss Tempest I consider the greatest actress on our stage. In this play she had to seem the under-dog until the last act, and she subdued her manner, like the artist she is, but she could not take that potent quality entirely out of her voice, which was full, as always, of her own personal magnetism. Now Miss Thomas, also an extremely clever actress, has rather an ordinary voice; it does not linger in one's memory. Lady Tree, on the other hand, has a very characteristic voice. You cannot think of Lady Tree without mentally hearing her voice, it is so expressive of her. This marked suggestion of individuality in the tone was exactly what was

needed to give point to the fact that Marie Tempest was, in this play, writhing under her domination.

The voice is the last thing a producer ever really alters. He may hammer and hammer at the cast until he gets the inflections he wants, but he cannot charge a voice with magnetism unless that magnetism is in the individual.

Some women are quite clever actresses and people say:

"Why is it she has not had her chance?"

Then perhaps her chance will come—and she fails. Why? Her acting is excellent; as they say of dogs, it is "difficult to fault." She is a handsome woman, and her speech is clear and easily audible. What is the matter? Simply that her voice lacks magnetism. It may have variety of inflection, but it lacks that subtle quality of tone which suggests a personality vivid enough to keep the attention of the audience through the whole of a long play. In the case of highly magnetic temperaments, the voice is like a weathercock; it expresses every grade of health or feeling. A face may flush, an eye brighten;

but if the health is bad, the voice will lose its ring.

Be sure that your voice is a just expression of yourself. Don't pick up other people's characteristics; don't be over-precise, or over-conscious. If you have some fault of pronunciation, practice carefully until you have overcome it, but always finish your practice by pouring out a flood of words, just for speed and spontaneity; and always, when practicing, speak words that come into your head; don't learn set speeches, but make them up as you go along.

James Welch was often accused of gagging, and it was very hard on actors who had to play with him, as they never knew, from night to night, what he was going to say. But he told me that that was how he kept himself sane. You cannot play the same part for ten years, as he played Guy de Vere in *When Knights were Bold,* without the repetition strongly affecting your nerves; but the fact that he was wording his lines for himself, night after night, kept them fresh. It was like a stream of running water flowing through the play.

If you cannot get the right inflection in a speech, just put the sense of the speech into your own words, and the inflection and emphasis will come as a matter of course. We are always our own best teachers and are entitled to turn the light of our individuality on to our work in any way we please, provided that we do it for the sake of improving the work and not with the view of subordinating that work to our personal vanity.

CHAPTER V

MOVEMENT AND FACIAL EXPRESSION

THE power of the eye! These words should be ever present in the actor's mind, for from the stage point of view the eye should be the birthplace of the thought. Unless one sees each fresh chain of ideas dawning in the actor's eye before he speaks the words embodying them, he will give the impression that he is merely repeating a lesson learnt by rote, and what he says will not seem spontaneous. A steadfast gaze compels attention, and if an actor's eye is steady and intelligent and conveys the thoughts he wishes to convey as if they had just that moment entered his mind, so that the illusion is well sustained, he is sure to hold the attention of his audience. Where the stage is concerned the eye always comes first; audiences need to be interested in what they see before they will listen to what is said; and unless the eye of the actor speaks to the eye of the

audience the words he utters will not dominate their intelligence.

In a previous chapter, I was speaking of the expression in the eyes of dogs, and how much an actor may learn from this. We all know that dogs have speaking eyes, but have you ever watched the mechanism of their expression? It consists in a constant use of the eyelids and the balls of the eye. A dog will never turn its head when turning the eye will do instead; it moves the eye-ball without the lids far more than we do, and it moves the lids themselves in a variety of ways that never seem to occur to us. As a matter of fact, although we human beings drop our lids over our eyes for sleep, or half-drop them to shut out a straining light, or for looking downwards, we keep them, in ordinary conversation, more or less in the same position. Most people are unaware that they can acquire further control of their eyelids. Artists screw up the eyes to look at their pictures, and some people half-shut their eyes when laughing; but the majority of us lose half the value of the eye because either the upper or the lower lid—sometimes both—is habitually

too far over the eye, which lessens its size and brilliance. The expression, and I may add the beauty, of many faces may be increased by practicing an exercise which trains the eye-lids to go back off the eye, making it seem more liquid and alive.

The exercise is as follows: Stand in front of the glass and look straight at your reflection with your normal gaze. If you put your finger just below the eye it ought to bring the lower lid down merely by reason of its weight, but be careful not to pull the lid down consciously, or it will come down too far. If this fails to do the trick, make your eyes start. Then, when the lids are well off the eye and the eye-ball as prominent as you can make it, try to relax the prominence of the eye-ball without letting the lids go back to their old place. Again, start with the eyes normal and turn them down, down, down, until you can see your own toes without letting the upper lid fall over the eyes. Then roll the eyes very very slowly round to the right side and up, seeing the whole of the wall to your right, without moving either upper or lower lids. Roll the eyes then so that you

can see the ceiling, without letting the lower lids come up, and complete the circle by seeing the wall all down the left side, until you come back to the first position, with the eyes looking straight in front, and both upper and lower lids drawn back from the eyes to their fullest extent, as they should be if this exercise has been properly done.

It was an old rule of the stage to look just above the eyes of the actor to whom you were speaking, because this gave a more open-eyed expression. We now sneer at the old stage rules, but if you will try this trick on your friends, looking not into the eyes, but just to the point where the hair grows (or should grow!) at the top of the forehead, you will find that they do not know that you are not looking into their eyes; but directly you do look into their eyes you will find that your lids come down over your own eyes, which, of course, has the effect of making them look smaller.

The expression in dogs' eyes is chiefly due to the variety of positions in which they place their eyelids. When very appealing they arch the upper lid tremendously; and nothing

is more significant than the half-open eye of a dog. If you drop the upper lid well over the eye, getting a half-open effect with the lower lid well down, you merely look sleepy. But if you get a half-open effect by lowering the upper lid a little and puckering up the lower lid, you get a singularly sinister effect. If through the slit thus left you can make the eye gleam, you look triumphant malice personified.

We have all the muscles in our eyelids that a dog has, but we have neglected them and no longer use them as we might.

Of course it is always a mistake to grimace, but, just as perfect grace depends on our having every muscle of the body and limbs under our control, so dramatic expression depends on our having control of the muscles of the face. Unless this control is disciplined, the desire to move one set of muscles will, nearly always, bring about an unconscious use of another set of muscles at the same time, so that with every movement we intend to make, we make also an unnecessary one, which very often spoils the grace of the whole effect. The habit of grimacing is

largely due to this automatic movement of too many muscles of the face when we wish to show expression. One of the surest ways to gain control over our muscles is to practice the habit of withdrawing nervous force when and where we please. The old Delsarte exercises are particularly useful for this purpose. For instance, take the wrist of the right hand in the left hand and let the right hand hang limp. Then shake the left hand up and down, as it is grasping the wrist; the right hand will flop up and down with the movement. Use the same idea with every part of the body, withdrawing the nervous force from every part in turn. This is an invaluable knack to acquire, as it is the secret of a really natural faint, or death fall. So many actors throw themselves down, instead of falling, and I have seen an actress, carried across a stage insensible, whose toes were obviously turning up with energy.

There is another reason why this is a useful trick to practice, and that is, that if you meet with an accident in real life which causes you to fall, you are very much less likely to hurt yourself if you have the knack of with-

drawing the nervous force from your body and falling limp. I once fell from the top of an omnibus. It suddenly lurched, and another passenger, falling against me, knocked me over. I shall never forget the green face of the conductor, who thought, of course, that I must be seriously injured. When he found that nothing was broken, and that I got up and began to move off unconcernedly, he showered after me a stream of the most virulent abuse, as if it were my fault! The poor man expressed his real relief by a flow of blasphemy which I have never heard equaled. It was certainly an amazing escape for me, and I attribute it entirely to the fact that, directly I felt myself falling, I remembered my Delsarte training and "decomposed." I might have decomposed in another sense if I hadn't!

I am not a believer in set poses or gestures, and I think that movement is very seldom taught in the right way. The best plan is to practice movement as I suggested practicing tone. Take an emotion and speak any words that come into your head, letting your face and gesture express these words natur-

ally, working up to climax. To get the hands well under control a good plan is to make them do ordinary every-day actions without the actual objects which are usually the reason for these actions. For instance, we are all in the habit of making tea, pouring it out, handing bread and butter, and so on. Imagine the tea service, cups, plates, etc., and go through all the actions of pouring out tea, serving the visitors and helping yourself without the actual objects. Go through the actions of brushing and dressing your hair, and putting on your clothes, taking care that every movement you make is really what it would be if you were actually doing these things. Test this by having the real articles near, and comparing your actions when using them with your actions when you have nothing to help you. In this way you will learn control and train your eye as well as your hand. From these small essays in pantomime proceed to bigger things. Invent situations and play scenes by yourself, either with or without the aid of words. But if you use words, let them be those that come into your head at the moment, and few in number.

In short, practice as if you were acting for the cinema, always bearing in mind that acting for the stage must be broader, quicker and more accentuated.

Whatever you do in real life, notice how you do it, and when you are alone, try to reproduce it. Above all, keep up your mimicry, and find out what it is, that, when we are walking behind strangers, makes us know whether they are young or old or middle-aged, and what type of person they are.

A good stage walk is an important point in an actor's equipment. The old stage rules on this matter should not be neglected. These were that upon entering one should take one's first step with the foot which is "up"; in other words, if you enter R., your first step is made with your left foot; if you enter L., with your right, and so on. When crossing the stage take long steps, moving from the hip and not the knee. Put the ball of the foot down first and not the heel, and avoid too springy a movement. If you have to "take the stage," finish your walk with the foot that is "up," and turn on the balls of the feet. For instance, if you are cross-

ing from R. to L., if you finish with your left foot down and turn easily, using the balls of the feet as pivots, you will find your right foot pointing a little up stage, just where you want it for your next movement. Another old rule was that if you are talking to another actor on the stage you stand with the weight of the body on one foot or the other, not poised between the two, and the foot that is "up" a little forward. For instance, if you are standing R.C., facing an actor L.C., you would stand with the weight of the body probably on the right foot, and the left foot, which is "up," a little in advance. In this way, although facing the man to whom you are speaking, you show more of the face and body than you would do if the right foot were advanced when you were in this position.

These old stage rules are often deliberately broken nowadays, and it is right that they should be, because a disregard of rule and regulation makes for variety. But one cannot break a rule effectively unless that rule has become second nature to one.

Poise, of course, is important to a graceful carriage on the stage. I usually give certain

wrestlers' poses as exercises for acquiring this, and any one can make up such exercises for himself. The important thing is to realize that unless the subject of poise is understood and the weight of the body in relation to equilibrium duly considered, the actor's movements will lack that sense of quiet assurance which is essential to the polish of a performance. Any eccentric carriage stamps an actor as a "type" and shuts him out from impersonating anything but that type.

Freedom from self-consciousness, of course, is essential. Whatever exercises you may practice to acquire grace, forget all about them when you are actually on the stage. Unless an actor has the power of absorbing himself in the part he is playing to such an extent that he moves and speaks instinctively as that character would move and speak, his work will never be convincing.

CHAPTER VI

CHARACTER IN MOVEMENT

ANY one who has studied the records of past centuries must have been struck by the fact that a certain type of attitude and gesture is characteristic of each age. It is determined partly by the costume of the age. The position of a man's hands, for instance, is affected by the position of his pockets. The carriage of the head is greatly influenced by the style and weight of the head-dress, and the movement of the feet by the type of footgear; or, in the case of women, by the breadth or tightness of the skirt. In classic dress the body was carried upright, and the sandaled feet, having no heels, were not lifted very far from the ground. You can tell from the frescoes that the back leg was rather dragged, the weight of the body being balanced on the front leg. This type of gait, with its exquisite, lithe languor, ready to spring any moment into pantherlike activity,

is to be found among savage races, whose unshod feet cling to the ground as did those of the old Greeks and Romans in their sandals.

In the middle ages the long points to the shoes gave a different type of gait altogether, and necessitated a rather straight lifting of the heels; while the Louis XV heels poise the foot upon the toe, the pointed toe being characteristic of the days when the minuet reigned supreme. Farthingales obliged women to carry their arms away from their sides, with the elbows rounded outwards; as, if the arms were flat to the sides, the farthingale would have been knocked in. The panniers of the Georgian age also kept the arms from the sides, but in this case the arm was nearly always bent, as it was the custom to carry a fan, spy glass, snuff-box or other trinket. The elbow sleeves, with the lace falling from the elbow, showed off the arm to perfection if it were bent at the elbow and the bare forearm carried well to the front. The high headdresses of this period necessitated an erect carriage of the head and neck; yet I have seen a Lady Teazle who, with a mountain on her head, lolled it to one side in such

a manner that, before the play was over, it began to look absurd.

All these little details should be borne in mind when playing what is professionally known as a "costume part." However obviously the differences of gait and movement seem indicated by the costume, it is difficult to change one's manner to fit a change of costume without a little practice. It is a useful exercise for the student to imagine himself garbed in the costumes of the various historical periods; then to think out and practice the manner characteristic of each.

Many a Shakespearean production has been spoilt for me because, although the costumes were gorgeous in themselves, their wearers had an air of discomfort in them, the manner and material being at variance. It is all very well to say that Shakespeare should be played and spoken like life, but what do we mean by this? Like our life of the twentieth century? This was not the life of Shakespeare's day, and those exquisite blank verse lines were never written to be chopped up into little bits, like the tabloid talk of our present rapid age. Shakespeare

meant every word of those lines to tell; he wrote them for actors who were going to play on the stages of his time, with an open-roofed auditorium and the audience distracted by the talking of the nobles sitting on the stage. He meant those lines to be given with such force that they compelled attention, and he wrote them with that end in view. It is "ridiculous" to speak them "in kid gloves," as one might say; they were not designed for the "talky-talky" tone of the intimate theater. Shakespeare wrote of striking events befalling heroic characters, and he poured all his own great soul into his work. To speak them as if they were the happenings of our humdrum every day is to belittle them and belie their author's intention. To my mind, a performance is convincing only if it is conceived on a right scale; to apply the puny methods of modern realism to Shakespeare seems to me like sticking the square peg into the round hole. But if you are going to speak blank verse and wear costume with an endeavor to get the Shakespearean atmosphere, you have got to be familiar with both. Get into the habit of speaking verse aloud until you can

make it up for yourself spontaneously. *Think* in blank verse! It need not be good verse, but let the metrical form become so familiar to you that you can fall into it at any time; then you will speak it as to the manner born. In the same way, if you are going to wear costume upon the stage, wear that costume, or something very like it, in the privacy of your own home for a week or two beforehand. Get used to it. Then your audience will have a chance of forgetting your clothes and concentrating their attention upon you. Study the pictorial representations of the period of the play, but don't make the mistake of overlarding your performance with attitudes and gestures deliberately copied from those pictures. If you do, your work will lose all spontaneity and become self-conscious and over-elaborated. Get into the atmosphere of the period by attention to its literature and art, and get used to wearing the clothes. If you are really an actor the rest will come of its own accord.

We often hear people speak of character in handwriting, character in the lines of the hand, character in physiognomy, but as a

rule we remain blind to the fact that there is character in the whole carriage of the body and in every movement of the head and limbs. It is impossible for any one even to sit in a chair without their attitude telling some secret of their being to an observant onlooker. It is not only our handwriting, but the way we hold the pen, which tells its tale; and nothing betrays mood more than the movement of our hands, so light when happy, so heavy with despair.

Actors studying character parts sometimes do their best to indicate youth or age by means of certain stereotyped trips and quavers; but character in movement is a much more subtle thing than this. It is not enough to speak of "light-footed youth" and the "lagging step of age." Whether our step be elastic or stumbling is very largely a matter of mood; and even the young, under the stress of a crushing emotion, will walk with leaden feet.

To make up one's mind that a certain carriage is suited to a part and to keep this unvaried from beginning to end of a play is short-sighted policy, and if the part be a long

one, tends to get on the nerves of the audience. In a matter of this sort it is, as I said before with reference to dialect, a case for a little discretion. Choose the right moment to mark a characteristic movement, leaving the rest of the performance a question of degree according to the feeling of the scene.

If you want to study character in relation to movement make a point of noticing any one behind whom you happen to be walking in the street. Draw all the deductions you can from their back view; then quicken your pace and pass them, glancing quickly at their face, and see how far your deductions are borne out by what that face conveys to you.

I once asked Hermann Vezin how he acquired his peculiar grace of carriage, for he was like a living statue, like an old Greek god come to life. He wore his Inverness cloak as if it were a toga, and yet no one would ever have dreamed of accusing him of pose or affectation, so free from all self-consciousness was he. He told me that he used to go to museums and stand in front of beautiful statues and frescoes, and let the poses "soak

into" him. He also told me that when he was young, as he walked along the streets, he had a habit of watching his reflection in the shop windows, which enabled him to check any fault of gait. He was a born mimic, and I have suffered agonies when going about with him because of his habit of mimicking any peculiarity of carriage he came across. It is very trying to pace Pall Mall side by side with an elderly gentleman who will insist on showing you how a lady in front lifts her skirt and minces in her walk.

I referred in an earlier chapter to the fact that, when we think of any of our friends we see them in our mind's eye in some characteristic attitude. So true is this that we can hardly think of any one without recalling the position and gesture which seem to epitomize the owner's personality.

Great writers frequently harp upon one trait in a character which they wish to set clearly before their readers, and some of them represent that character as constantly using a certain gesture, which epitomizes the character. As an instance we may quote Dickens, who draws Uriah Heep washing his

hands, the hangman in *Barnaby Rudge* sucking the head of his stick, and Jacques III in *The Tale of Two Cities* with rapacious forefinger smoothing down his upper lip. If actors took a hint from this and, when studying a character, saw clearly the attitude and gesture which seem to epitomize that character, we should get more suggestive work upon the stage. We frequently see the would-be "character" actor, when playing an old man, attend carefully to such irritating details as a palsied head, shaking hands and quavering voice, yet make the part merely a representation of senility in general, omitting the more individual traits of that particular man. Old age is not always palsied, and it does not always speak in a cracked voice; nor is their mere age the most significant quality about old people. For the honor of the human race actors should know better than to content themselves with such conventional devices.

When taking character parts the great thing is to suggest the key-note of the character. If you are clear about this yourself and have any power of conveying what you yourself think to others, you will not fail in

filling in the outward details. But if the inner meaning of the part is not clear to you, if you are not perfectly sure in your own mind of the type of human being you wish to impersonate, all the mechanical aids of assumed voice and studied gesture will fail to help you to suggest a living image to the minds of the audience. Details are all very well, but essentials must come first; and unless these essentials are right and clear and significant, details merely serve to confuse and obscure the impression the actor wishes to create. On the other hand, if an actor, being clear about the innate personality he wants to represent, can see that personality in his mind's eye in the attitude and with the mannerism which really epitomize it, and can reproduce these, he will have a triumph. I am not, of course, implying that he is to cling to them from first to last of his performance, but merely that he is to use them at the right moments, so that the suggestion they convey may go home to the minds of the audience, who will then have grasped his intention and will, unconsciously, aid him to carry it out. Over-elaborate work is always a mistake; be

right about the essentials and leave them to speak for themselves. If you have the instinct of acting you will be the unconscious instrument of your work, and will "get it over the footlights," because all you do will be instinctive and sincere.

Remember that the art of the stage is largely a question of suggestion, and that every trifling thing that happens on the stage is apt to leave an impression on the audience, which, once implanted, it is difficult to eradicate. For this reason little things are often of the greatest importance; but, on the other hand, a multiplicity of detail, like an overstocked shop window, simply defeats its own purpose and reduces everything to the level of nothing. Too much gesture is irritating and singularly ineffective. The actor who is sure of his effect is the actor who never moves without a purpose, so that the gesture, when made, stands out by contrast with his habitual stillness and seems, therefore, charged with significance. It is a common fault of the amateur to fidget and shift about. One of the first things he has to learn is to keep still, and—above all—never to move in such a

way as to distract the attention of the audience from another actor upon the stage when it is important that their eyes should be focused upon this other actor. When lines have to be spoken containing information relative to the main end of the play—information which it is important that the audience shall understand and remember—it is an invariable rule of production that the actors on the stage should keep as still as possible, so that nothing may distract attention from the actual meaning of the words. As I said in an earlier chapter, it is an unforgivable sin to attract attention to oneself by means of by-play when one's part is not immediately prominent in the business of the scene. It is just as important to know how to efface yourself at the right moment as it is to know how to rivet attention when occasion demands.

Remember that everything to do with the stage is effective by reason of contrast, and that what you do will be infinitely more successful if you do not try to do too much. Vigor owes its value to the fact that it contrasts with repose, and for the zealous

amateur repose is very often one of the most difficult qualities to acquire. He wants to be acting all the time and finds it hard to realize that one must not consciously try to act, and that one is only an actor, in the higher sense of the word, when impersonation comes of its own accord. The first and the most essential of all lessons is to learn to sink oneself. Think of the play first and foremost. However proud you may be of your own part in that play, your impersonation will only prove of value if it takes its right place in the scheme of the whole production. Your part will stand out if you work for the value of the scene, but if you think of yourself only and try to give your part a prominence which is detrimental to the balance and purpose of the play, you will find yourself associated with a failure, and will have produced on the minds of the audience a sense of irritation no less real because they may possibly be unable to say exactly to what it is due.

CHAPTER VII

WORDS AND THEIR SPOKEN VALUE

THE pronunciation and delivery of words do not by any means exhaust the actor's responsibility towards the text he speaks. One cannot deliver a line with a due sense of its significance unless one has an innate and cultivated instinct for the right word in the right place. In the old days we used to say that there was no need for an actor to be educated, and even went the length of implying that education was detrimental to an actor inasmuch as it was supposed to imbue him with the acquired characteristics of a certain class, and render him less adaptable. The influx of Oxford and Cambridge men upon the stage and the conspicuous success of the O.U.D.S. as a training school for actors have done much to break down this old prejudice, which sprang, I think, from the days when to be an actor was to be practically a social outcast, an injustice which naturally im-

planted in the minds of actors a grudge against the educated classes of society.

I have harped already in the earlier chapters of this book upon the vital necessity for a broad and tolerant understanding of all types of human nature, but study of human nature alone is not sufficient. It must be supplemented by the study of books. The value of words is an essential part of an actor's mental equipment, for if he is deaf to the literary flavor of the lines he speaks, he will do them less than justice. Many actors find it difficult to learn accurately. They get the sense of the author's meaning, but they will alter the position of the words and sometimes the actual words themselves. I am not here pleading for the author's ideal, which is that every line of his text as he originally writes it shall be delivered verbatim on the stage, because no one with any experience of the stage could suppose that an author is necessarily the best judge of the stage value of the lines he writes. This depends on the author's experience, on the cast engaged for his play and on other points. But I do want to make it clear that, although it may be necessary for

the producer to alter the wording of some of an author's lines, it is unfair to the whole production for the members of the cast arbitrarily to alter this wording again, merely to accommodate the laziness of their own memories. Accuracy of text, that is of the text which is ultimately approved by the producer, is merely a matter of common fairness to the author, cast, management, audience and every one concerned in the performance, and it should be a point of honor among actors to keep to this text as closely as they possibly can.

But there are many cases in which it is impossible to do this, and some in which the play does actually benefit by a transgression of this law. There are certain actors, usually comedians, whose own wit is so delightful that good lines will spring to their lips spontaneously as the play progresses, and when this is so it would be a pity to deprive the play of the sparkle and freshness which such lines introduce into the dialogue. It does not necessarily follow, however, that every actor with a knack of gagging improves the actual dialogue of the play. There are only too

many instances to the contrary. It is certain that an actor's spontaneous lines will not be of the right type unless he has himself a real sense of the value of words. A joke depends so much for its point upon the crispness of its wording, and a line which is charged with emotion is trebled in value if it consists merely of two or three poignant words. The arrangement of the words of any sentence will go far to make that sentence effective or the reverse, and the relative value of every word in every phrase is so essential in the performance of a play that it should be one of the first duties of an actor to study this subject until he has mastered it thoroughly.

It often happens that some little thing will go wrong upon the stage; one of the actors will dry up, and another will have to gag to cover the hiatus. In cases of this sort a right use of words is invaluable, and actors who have this resource at their tongues' end will be of service in an emergency. Stage life seems, indeed, a continual round of emergencies, and resourcefulness is of the utmost importance. Some actors are unable to learn a text with literal accuracy, and they continual-

ly give wrong cues or cues which are not worded exactly as they should be. In this case the actor replying to the cue has on the spur of the moment to re-word his reply; and here again it is necessary that he should be quick to choose the words which will best meet the occasion. Especially is this the case if the play is what we call a costume play, the action of which takes place at a historical period, as in this case an actor who has no sense of style may commit the mistake of supplying a word which is unsuited to the period. I remember watching with delight Ellen Terry's exquisite performance of Olivia in the dramatic version of *The Vicar of Wakefield,* when all of a sudden the illusion was shattered for me because, as she was arranging the dear old Vicar on the sofa, she said: "Come along and let me make you comfy!" To genius like Ellen Terry's much may be forgiven; but an error of that sort is nevertheless an error, and the greater the performance the more conspicuous the blemish.

Costume plays, indeed, cannot be rightly played unless the actor is acquainted with the

style of phraseology which belonged to the period about which the play is written. When we are using words of a kind different from those which we use in every-day life we are apt to show that they are unfamiliar to us by delivering them in a stilted and self-conscious way. It is not too much to say that a costume play can only be convincingly rendered if the actors playing in it are sufficiently familiar with the literature of the time to use words characteristic of the period with ease. If an actor is not acquainted with the meaning of the words he uses he is liable at any moment to make some silly mistake if his memory should be temporarily hazy. I remember hearing one lady say: "Father, will you shrove me?" She meant "shrive me," but as she had not the least idea what the word really implied and as she had at some time or other heard of Shrove Tuesday, which she associated with pancakes, the word "shrove" came more easily to her lips. When I ventured to point out the mistake she said: "Oh, it's near enough." It may have been—for her!

I remember feeling furious with the late

Sir Herbert Tree because he would say "Seneco" for Seneca from beginning to end of one particular play; I do not know why, as he was certainly the last man from whom one would expect a mistake of this sort. Such mistakes get on the nerves of anybody in the audience who happens to know, and the only safe way to avoid them is to be well read. Nowadays we have a wave of Shakespearean enthusiasm passing over Stageland, which is certainly all to the good; but as I listen to the modern Shakespearean performance I cannot help fancying that some of the actors are patting themselves on the back for getting through the lines successfully. I have no doubt whatever that they think them very beautiful; but somehow I rather question whether they understand their full meaning or humanity. I think they look on them as precious things much as the ordinary visitor to a museum looks on the curiosities which he is allowed to view in their glass cases. This is the mental attitude of many people where Shakespeare is concerned, and has also been our attitude towards Ibsen, because we are familiar with him in the stately English

of William Archer's translation and know little of the homely fun which characterizes the original Norwegian. From this and similar errors in the point of view spring, I believe, the chief evils of what Americans call the high-brow school. Evils there are without a doubt, because the tendency of that school is to put good work before us in such a way that we see it as a thing apart from our daily life, and are, therefore, unable to assimilate with its beauties our sense of the world around us. This is a mistake quite as great as that of over-modernizing classics. From the Greeks of old throughout the ages, from the great Elizabethans to the really earnest writers of our own day, we find that the author of genius draws life as he sees it in all its homely setting, embellished by many a touch, both humorous and pathetic, from his own personal experience; and if the picture which ultimately evolves from his pen seems to us above our own estimate of common things, it is merely because with his more searching vision he has seen what we have not appreciated. It is a question of high lights and relief; but never do we get a really great

dramatist who draws characters devoid of humanity or puts upon the stage a point of view whose idealism is beyond all likeness to the truth. Therefore, when studying the works of the great masters, we must always bear in mind the fact that what their characters say is the talk of those around the playwright, charged with the message and the insight of his own penetrating brain. If we play these characters "on stilts," if we speak those lines as if we knew that we were uttering words of wisdom beyond the ken of common humanity, we lessen or destroy the value of their message. It is just because, however beautifully expressed, the lines of a great writer have always in them the touch of our common humanity, the understanding of that which we all feel and that which we all know, even though we may be unconscious that we know it—it is just because of this that such lines are the utterance of genius and that such plays last through the ages with their vitality unimpaired. To approach these plays with any feeling that they are beyond common comprehension and concern things outside life, to treat them, in fact, as *objets*

de vertu and to trick out their performance with artifice and eccentricity, is to my mind to do a great wrong. The way to approach such work is to become familiar, not only with the work itself, but with all that concerns it; and this can only be done if the actor devotes himself to literary study. He will then gauge the atmosphere too well to fall either into the fault of aloofness or into the equal error of jarring commonplace.

One often hears a producer call up an actor for the delivery of a certain line. He will say: "Don't be so precious," using the word "precious," of course, to mean pedantic. I am not aware that we use this word in this sense nowadays in any other connection, but the *précieuses* of the days of Louis XIV give us an example of the word with the same meaning. How it is that this use of the word "precious" has survived upon our stage I do not know and should be interested to hear. But for whatever reason, it is constantly so employed at rehearsals, and it has always seemed to me expressive. It clearly conveys the fact that the actor is too interested in the value of the word as a literary curiosity,

thinking of the word by itself apart from its relation to the whole sentence. Now when an actor is well read this does not happen. When we have a full sense of the value of words and are speaking a sentence which is particularly well expressed, it is not a single word which will strike us so much as the balance of the whole sentence. The more that sentence seems to us well chosen, the greater will be the conviction with which we shall speak it; and it is those actors who have a sense of the value of words who speak their lines with conviction, and so get the full meaning of those words over the footlights to the intelligence of the listening audience.

We are all crying out for a higher standard of play upon our modern stage, which we feel has fallen into a bad way. Unfortunately, however, our intellectuals show a tendency to form themselves into a *coterie* which demands to be catered for apart from the general public. This is a pity. The mission of the stage is to promote good fellowship, and anything that tends to separate audiences into cliques is detrimental to the higher purposes of acting. The goal for which we

should all aim is to raise the general level of the stage, and we can only do that if we all contribute by putting into our work the best that is in us. At present the managers are usually blamed for everything; but surely the fault lies a little with us all. The critics are too inclined to shut their eyes to the actor's point of view, and have not always that nice sense of the technique of the actor's art which alone can enable them to distinguish between the work of the actor and the responsibility of the dramatist himself. The public, in its turn, is sometimes regardless of the financial side of the matter, and is inclined to expect the manager to take a speculative risk which only a multi-millionaire could afford. Dramatists keep an ideal cast in their mind's eye and are not always able to see that in dealing with actors they are dealing with human beings and must allow for human limitations. Some of them, moreover, are apt to think their own dialogue of more importance than the actor's work, and do not give enough chances for the art of acting to come into its own. In other words, they give the actors too much to say and too little to do. Never-

theless the actors themselves are only too often to blame, because some of them think the lines of their parts are merely a vehicle for emotional expression and concern themselves with the meaning of those lines without a due appreciation of the care which goes to the choosing of the words which shall carry the full force of that meaning home.

CHAPTER VIII

AUDIENCES

All audiences differ, and for an actor to achieve success he must learn to develop a sixth sense, an intuition which enables him to feel with certainty the point of view which any particular audience is likely to take. He must be in touch with his audience from first to last, and to accomplish this he must have a real, though perhaps unconscious, sensitiveness for the needs and wishes of others. I have purposely used the word "feel" because it is a word we use professionally; we always talk of "feeling" our audiences, as if we had *antennae* sensitive to every unspoken thought and subtle change. An actor who is worthy of the name will vary his methods according to his circumstances. The choice of cast will affect his work; if he is playing with a weak actor, he will use restraint; if with a strong one, he will let himself go with considerably more abandon. He will be guided by the bal-

ance of the play, and where he feels that the author has overwritten a scene he will tone it down; but if he feels that a scene is underwritten he will speak his lines with stress to make up by emphasis of tone for the lack of distinction in the wording. Directly he is in front of an audience he will know in the main to what type of people he is to play and will underline what is likely to please and rein in what is likely to be misunderstood. A really good dramatic effect will be suppressed before some audiences for fear that it should get a laugh, taking the leap from the sublime to the ridiculous in their untutored imaginations. The moment he is upon the stage an actor must be sensitively aware of the thoughts of the listening crowd before him; he must study their point of view or he can never gain dominance over them.

Now it is good for all of us to be obliged to consider the point of view of those about us. Perhaps there is no mental training more valuable than that of being compelled to find a mode of expression for that which we wish to say, some sure way to convey our meaning to brains of a different type from our own.

I have heard actors express contempt for a certain class of audience, but this is a mistake. One may take it for granted that in every audience, however unresponsive the majority may seem, there will be at least one brain that understands, one spirit to whom it is well worth while to give the best that is in us.

There is a certain type of actor who, through some kind of youthful conceit, is apt to think it not worth while to take much trouble except for a first night or for some special occasion. And indeed, in these days of long runs, an actor may be forgiven for getting so stale in an oft-repeated part that he becomes careless. If we can only bear in mind the fact that life has a little way of springing surprises on us and that at any moment we may meet a brain that understands, perhaps a little of this carelessness might be kept in check. Some actors are apt to think it not worth while to do any work that is not well paid or done under flattering auspices. I remember once, when I was responsible for a small charity concert, a young actress who had promised her services failed

me at the last moment for no good reason at all, and I asked a little amateur friend of mine to take her place. It so happened that a well-known man who had heard of the professional actress turned up at the concert with the purpose of seeing her, as it happened to be given at a hall a few steps from his private house. He saw instead my little amateur friend, promptly offered her an engagement, and she is now earning twenty-five pounds a week.

Now this girl had a genuine feeling for humanity in her heart, and that is why she has proved successful on the stage. I am strongly of the opinion that if we have the type of character which turns up a mental nose at any section of our fellow men we are unfitted to do good work upon the stage.

Remember that not only is it the task of an actor to play upon the feeling of his audience; he is also depending for his success upon their sympathy, which he cannot expect to receive unless he, in turn, is ready and able to give. There are many moments, even in a successful career, when we have to beg our audience to be tolerant towards us. Our health is not

always at its best, and we have to play many a time under a disadvantage. On all these occasions we hope for mercy, and in most cases receive it; for though an audience can be cruel, it is far more often kind.

No actor has a right to despise any portion of that public from whom as a whole he receives so many favors. The public will always respond if we make an appeal to its sense of fair play. There is a story of Mlle. Mars, the great French actress, which pleases me. She had been a favorite all her life, and when she was getting old the management revived certain plays in which she had made successes in her youth that she might play those parts once more before retiring. It happened in one of these plays that she had to say:

"Je suis jeune; je suis belle!"

The audience tittered. She quietly looked up and said.

"Je suis Mademoiselle Mars."

The house came down with a round of applause.

Many of us nowadays have trained brains, and we argue about psychology and dissect

our fellow human beings with subtlety and understanding, but it is often the wrong sort of understanding; it is cold, critical and over-emphatic of trifles. True comprehension is an impressionistic sense of all the bigger possibilities of human nature, beside which details drop into their real insignificance. All work for the stage has to be more or less impressionistic, and no amount of careful detail will build up a real bit of character drawing if the main traits of the character have been misunderstood. No man must be judged by what he is; we must always bear in mind what he might be. An actor who has the power of eliminating unimportant circumstances and getting at essentials, and then, afterwards, restoring those circumstances and filling in each little detail, so that they fall into their right places in proportion to the value of the greater attributes, is an actor whose work is going to have depth and value. If his audience is of the intellectual type, he may venture to give them what he actually sees himself, but when dealing with an average audience he must adapt his own conception to their comprehension, and must set

the important things before them with clearness and assurance, which can sometimes only be done if certain details are omitted. The average brain can only take in one thing at a time. To be clear one must often express just a single thought and hammer at it, and that is why impressionistic methods are frequently the most effective for the stage.

It is all a matter of selection, and if an actor has developed that sixth sense which enables him to "feel" his audiences, right selection will become instinctive to him. He will give them what they want, and will leave on their minds a clear image of all that they need to understand without weakening the effect of his work by an elaboration which would merely bewilder.

Everything where the stage is concerned must adjust itself to the conditions of the stage; footlights, the size of the stage itself, and the size of the auditorium—all these things must be taken into account. In a small theater one need not raise one's voice to any great extent, provided one's articulation is clear. But in a large theater much more volume of tone is required, and it is harder to

get a natural conversational effect. The actor will again find himself obliged to adapt his methods to circumstances. The easy, rapid speech and delicate facial play which would be effective enough in the one house, will go for nothing in the other, where speech must be slower, emphasis stronger and gesture broader to get over the footlights. In an intimate theater one can risk subtle by-play, but on a bigger stage only broad effects are obtainable, and some marked mannerism or bit of business must be used to make a character stand out. For this reason also it is necessary for an actor to be plastic. At every turn of his career he will find that he is obliged to adapt himself to circumstances.

There is another way in which he is expected to comply—a tiresome way and one which I, myself, think is greatly to the detriment of the stage. When he is engaged as an understudy he is expected to imitate his principal, and in some cases this imitation is driven to the point of minute mimicry. A little time ago actors in touring companies were, all too frequently, supposed to copy even the voices of the London companies, a

method which led to the propagation of the mannerisms of popular stars. I am glad to say that the evil of this custom so quickly made itself felt that it is no longer rampant, and where it is still to be found, I think it is often due to the fact that some actors, being naturally mimics, copy instinctively. From whatever cause it springs, it is greatly to be deplored, for it knocks all the spontaneity out of acting and sometimes engenders faults which are never afterwards thrown off.

Mimicry is admirable practice for the actor, and I should certainly advise any one going into the profession to do his best to mimic those about him, especially when he meets types that are likely to be useful for the stage; but, though able to copy, he must be careful that he only does so at will. It must not become a habit or he will acquire the knack of picking up all the intonations and nervous ways which most irritate him in others.

One golden rule for an actor is—Always listen to anything that others have to say about you, no matter how unpleasant. As

Hermann Vezin once said to me: "Stricture, even from fools, sometimes does good."

If other people think certain things about us, those things must be true of us from their point of view. There is nothing in this world so healthy as a good dressing-down. To the credit of the profession be it said that actors take this sort of thing, in the way of business, with an admirable gratitude. One of my truest friends to this day is that well-known American actor, Frank Mills. In one of my early criticisms I tore a performance of his to ribbons and, instead of resenting this, he promptly wrote me a letter asking for more! It is one thing to take a "slating" in private, but it is very much harder to have to endure this sort of thing in the presence of one's fellow actors. Yet it may happen to you at any rehearsal if you enter our cheerful profession—so be prepared! Think of yourself merely as an instrument to be used to get the best possible result for the good of the whole play. Look at yourself impersonally as a third person, and help the producer to put that self through its paces.

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CHAPTER IX

HOW TO "FEED" AND HOW TO BUILD UP

THE phrase "to feed" might well be incorporated in our daily speech, for the art of "feeding"—in its dramatic sense—is intimately connected with the art of living. We mean by a "feeding" part one whose object it is to bring out the salient *traits* in some principal character and to serve as a recipient of the joys and sorrows of that character. All old plays had a subsidiary rôle called in theatrical parlance "the confidant," as readers of Sheridan's *Critic* will remember. A well written "feeding" part eliminates the necessity for soliloquies and proves useful as a "pace-maker" to the audience by suggesting to them the attitude they ought to take towards the principal characters in the play. The art of "feeding" is a difficult one and is somewhat similar to the art of accompanying in music. All singers know that their finest efforts may be ruined by a

bad accompanist, and all actors know that a good "feeder" turns the task of a star from a labor into a joy. As in the case of the accompanist, the qualities that go to the making of a good "feeder" are sympathy, presence of mind, quickness of judgment and discrimination. He gets very little credit from the general public, but his work is of vital importance to the profession, and, what is much to the point, he is always sure of steady work. I remember hearing James Welch say of the late Charles Allen: "Acting with him is like playing ball. He is so quick at tossing it back." Of course, what Welch meant was that Charles Allen had the knack of looking interested in everything that was said to him the whole time he was on the stage, an invaluable quality and in no way to be confounded with the habit of grimacing. I have seen young actors, who have been told of the importance of listening, pull so many faces when any other actor was speaking that, instead of increasing the interest of the scene, they have simply distracted the attention of the audience from the speaker, whose words it was important they should hear. The art

of listening is by no means the art of making faces. It depends entirely on the steady and interested expression in the eye, and in this respect approximates more to the art of the film-actor.

Once, when I was still writing as a dramatic critic, I devoted a special paragraph to praise of an unknown actor who was playing the part of the Clerk in the Trial Scene of *The Merchant of Venice*. I still remember his face distinctly, and the quiet, earnest expression in his eye as he listened to the proceedings of the trial. He made you feel that you must listen too. Of course this is just a matter of suggestion. Every one knows that if you stop in a street and stare up at some particular roof a crowd will quickly gather and stare at that roof too. You have suggested to them that there must be something there worth watching. This exemplifies in a nutshell the art of listening on the stage. If you listen to what the other actors say to you as if it interested you, the audience will take it for granted that it is worth while to listen; but if your attention obviously wanders, their attention will be apt

to wander, especially if you do anything which attracts it in too marked a manner to yourself. "Do as you would be done by" is an important maxim of conduct for the actor, for everything on the stage is a matter of give and take.

It is considered selfish to get above another actor on the stage, as it obliges the other actor to turn his face away from the audience when speaking up towards you. Duologue scenes should be played as much as possible on a line. Some actors have an inveterate habit of getting slightly above any one else who may be playing with them. I remember hearing my uncle, William Holman, say that the only way to cure actors of this fault was to stand right in front of them, as it immediately obliged them to come down stage.

No matter how big a part may be, there will be moments when it is "feeding" some other part in the scene, and in this case, instead of feeling impatient at the subordinate position to which you have temporarily lapsed, you should welcome it as a moment of relief and contrast. In the building-up of a big rôle you must snatch at every possible

chance of variety, and indeed a variety of varieties must be considered and cultivated by all the means in your power.

In building-up a big part you have got to eschew everything that makes for limitations. It is essential to have a great variety of movement and gesture, inflection, tone of voice, mode of delivery, and—above all—pace. Though a good stage walk may be an asset, yet a man's walk is apt to vary with the state of his emotions, and a subtle change of gait will help to carry the scene home with a dumb intensity more pregnant than any spoken words. If a man is habitually graceful, one sudden, awkward movement will arrest the eye, and no beautiful pose will touch our hearts so surely as the stumble and lurch which great emotion forces from its victim, who sways under its power like a drunken man.

The same with gesture. Be graceful, be decisive, be significant; but when occasion calls, be clumsy. We lose control of our physical being when our hearts are wrung.

Last, and most important of all—be careful that your pace, tone and inflection are

ever changing. A monotony of pace is sure to produce a somnolent effect upon the hearer. Nothing is so exciting as a rush of words, nothing so solemn as retarded utterance. If our interest is sufficiently aroused we hang upon those slowly dropping words, waiting for their message.

It is easy to cultivate changes of tone. The fault of most of our speakers is that they will not sacrifice the beauty of their voice even for a moment, and by delivering all they have to say in a uniformly beautiful tone satiate our ears with a musical monotony. Knock out the tone when you can and work for contrast.

Dogs make a splendid audience on which to practice intonation. As they do not understand the actual words you utter, except in the case of certain words with which they are familiar, it is the tone and the tone alone on which you must rely for your effect when speaking to them at any length. Try it. Stare into a corner of the room and sink your voice to a terrified whisper. Your dog will turn his head and look into the corner, then get up and go to see what is the matter.

Begin to speak tearfully, and he will sit at your feet and whine with sympathy. Talk lovingly to him and he will jump on to your lap and kiss your face and lay his head upon your breast like a happy child. Begin to talk about fun and games, and he will dance with delight. Lose your temper, and he will prick up his ears, but he will know you are not in a temper with him. If, however, any one else speaks angrily to you, he will come out from under the sofa and growl. It is all due to intonation. Practice on your dog, and you will soon learn the value of sound.

Besides the mere delivery of one's lines, there are many effects which a clever actor uses to build-up his part and make it more convincing. Even in the delivery of the lines themselves there are certain little tricks which make for spontaneity.

I remember, when I was quite a school-girl, having a holiday at the seaside. I went on the Wednesday night to the theater to see *Drink;* not at all the sort of play that one would expect to appeal to a girl of my age and type. Yet the marvel of Charles Warner's acting so held me that I went to every

performance for the rest of the week, and always, when I saw the play billed afterwards, I turned up again to see it.

Warner had a little habit of stopping in the middle of a sentence, repeating a word, pausing, and then finishing, which conveyed extraordinarily the impression that he was expressing the thought that had that moment come into his mind. Break up a sentence in this way, and you will see how natural it seems; but, of course, no device of this sort can be used continually.

Ejaculations, also, increase the freshness of one's speech. Maxine Elliot is an artist in the use of ejaculation. "H'm, h'm!" for "Yes," a shake of the head and a smile for "No"—any little characteristic touch of this sort will give individuality to one's playing. It is certainly necessary to seem at times as if one were pausing to seek just the right word to express one's thought, and nothing is so torpid on the stage as the suggestion that one has learnt one's lines by heart and is delivering them like a machine.

A few lines on make-up should certainly be included in this attempt to summarize the

many details which combine together to build up a good performance. It is impossible to lay down hard and fast rules with regard to make-up because the actor's own personal appearance must be the deciding factor as to what paints and shadings should be used. I will, therefore, merely say this: that one can seldom get a good effect from the use of one grease-paint as a ground-work, and that it is nearly always necessary to mix two or more until one has achieved the desired result. In short, consider your face a canvas and paint on it, taking pains to smooth off the colors. Merely to line with a lining pencil when a "character" make-up is required is unsatisfactory to a degree. The effect must be carefully considered with regard to high lights and shading, and, above all, the size and lighting of the theater must be taken into account. Never forget the back of the neck. I have seen so many actors on the stage whose make-up finishes on a line with the face, the back of the neck being quite a different color.

A good stage laugh is an asset and can easily be cultivated if you take care to develop it from your natural laugh. To prac-

tice ha-ha-ha-ing all the way up and down the scale does no good at all. However musical the result, it remains artificial. Try first to get a little gurgle into your voice as you speak. Let the joke gradually overcome you until you are bound to burst into a laugh. Having once succeeded in making yourself laugh in this way, laugh again, finishing on a higher note, and once again, ending on a higher note still, until you can break into peal after peal of laughter. The danger now will be that, having once started, you won't be able to stop! If you can laugh like this, the audience is bound to laugh with you. But I want to emphasize the fact that to start with your stage laugh must be on the lines of your natural laugh. If your own laugh is ugly never mind. Start practicing for a stage laugh simply by trying to make yourself use your own laugh whenever you please. Having once acquired this knack, you can then improve your own laugh and make it more musical, and your stage laugh will naturally become musical too.

I had an extremely ugly laugh as a girl, and the first elocution teacher to whom I

went tried to teach me to laugh by pronouncing a series of musical ha-ha-ha's. I was told to start high and come down the scale, which seemed to me unnatural, for in real life I always go up the scale when laughing, as I fancy is usually the case. I then, of my own accord, learnt a poem which amused me, and as I tried to say it aloud I began to laugh as I spoke until the laugh overpowered the words, which became inaudible. After that I quickly taught myself to laugh my own laugh naturally, laughing whenever I pleased. I cannot claim for it that it is a thing of beauty even yet, but I am always told it is infectious, and sometimes, when I have been in an audience, my friends on the stage have said afterwards that they knew I was there, as they recognized my laugh!

At a certain stage in the rehearsals producers are in the habit of saying:

"Now I want to get the music of the lines."

The music of the lines is a quality which must never be forgotten. In this, as in everything else, contrast is the thing to bear in mind; and the more musical your tone when occasion allows, the more dramatic will be

the effect of a change to a tone which is harsh with emotion.

When trying to cultivate music in the speaking voice be sure that it is your own natural voice which you are using for your experiments. When I was a school-girl and my voice was settling down from child to woman, I went through almost as marked a change as that which boys undergo, because my natural voice is a contralto, so often an ugly duckling of a voice when it first begins to settle. The result was, that at the ages of fourteen and fifteen my speaking voice was unchildlike, and my people objected to it. I was told that it sounded grumpy. In a vain attempt to brighten it I took to speaking on too high a note, with the result that I began to get varicose veins in the throat, and only overcame the mischief by careful training with that well-known voice-trainer, the late Mrs. Emil Behnke. Therefore I say very emphatically—when practicing use your natural voice. If it is ugly, never mind. Directly you begin to use it correctly and have acquired the knack of the "forward tone," you will find music beginning to creep into it until

in time it rounds into harmony both on and off the stage.

Whatever devices you may practice, remember that they must never be used unless the part actually calls for them. To bring in any stage effect for the sake of effect is to insult the intelligence of your audience. I remember one actress, whom I was coaching for the part of Lady Teazle, begging me to let her introduce a scream and faint. I told her that I could see no suitable moment for such a bit of business, but she only said:

"Oh! but I *must* introduce a scream and faint! I did in that last play I played in, and got such a round of applause."

Very likely; but where acting is concerned, though you may make a small, individual triumph through the use of illegitimate effects, you can only do this at the sacrifice of your professional honor. It is just a question of what you most value—a transitory success or a lasting reputation. However commercialized an art may be, the memory of its financial magnates soon dies away; but centuries will pass before we forget a Garrick or a Siddons.

CHAPTER X

METHODS OF CERTAIN FAMOUS ACTORS

Ours is supposed to be a profession which develops our vanity to an abnormal degree. The popular idea of an actor is a creature who wears extraordinary clothes, who goes about doing everything he can to focus attention upon himself, and who is essentially insincere in all the ways of his daily life. Now this is absurd. Our whole work is of a nature which obliges us to keep a constant check upon and to criticize ourselves unsparingly. Other professions demand only one facet of brain and character; the other half of the human being is free to relax in any way he pleases. On the stage we are using our very bodies as the vehicles of our professional work, and every movement of those bodies, every tone of our voice, every tendency of our mind and character tells in our work. The stage of to-day is especially concerned with the presentation of modern life,

and the way we behave in our daily life sets the standard of our work, because it influences our whole outlook and consequently our impersonations at the theater. We have to keep a watch on our most ordinary acts, because if we pick up a bad habit we are liable to reproduce it on the stage.

Our work is never finished. Night after night we repeat and repeat a performance. We cannot, as would an author or a painter, finish our work and send it forth to the world to be judged on its merits without further effort on our part. We have to give ourselves to the daily reproduction of our work, and when we cease to do this that work dies. Further, we have to be continually criticizing ourselves, as if we relax for one day the performance on that day may fall far below our standard and do a great deal of harm. It is essential for an actor to keep up to his level. The whip is ever behind him, lashing him on. Now to do this it is necessary to invite continual criticism, because we get used to our own effects and soon become unable to judge of the merit of a performance which we are repeating nightly. I am myself "indifferent

honest," and in daily life I fear I am sometimes guilty of the courteous evasion when asked for my opinion on subjects apart from professional work; but I should never dream of insulting any actor by withholding the honest truth from him. Sharp as my criticisms have often been, I have never met an actor who resented them, and I am quite used to being asked to view a performance again and again that I may judge for myself whether the improvements I have ventured to suggest have been successfully incorporated. This is no special compliment to me. It is merely the attitude which any actor worth his salt takes as a matter of course when a friend criticizes adversely, and the greater the actor the more eager he is to get every detail of his performance judged by an impartial onlooker. We know we are too near our own work to criticize it for ourselves. Before rehearsals are over even the producer and manager have got so used to the play that they have "gone stale" and can no longer rely on their judgment. For this reason during the last week of rehearsals we all welcome what we call a fresh eye, and

any comment, no matter how scathing, will be received with respect, conned, and when possible accepted. When I was working for James Welch, he used to like me to see the show every week, and always after the performance I had to detail to him every tiny thing I had noticed, and he would make a mental note of it all.

I remember the first occasion on which I ever saw him. I had been writing as a critic for some time, and to my joy one day I got a letter from him speaking of my criticisms and asking me to come and see him. The run of *Mr. Hopkinson* had just started, and down I went to the theater to see the show. After the first act his secretary came along and took me to Welch's dressing-room. Welch stared when he saw me.

"Why," he said, "I thought you were a big woman!"

At any rate I was quite as big as he was! Then we settled down to talk, and he asked me what I thought of his Hopkinson. I said that the scene with the Duchess was most sympathetic.

"Sympathetic! Sympathetic!" he said. "Hopkinson is an outsider!"

"Is he?" said I. "Right through the play? Why, I thought from the shy way you tumbled down those steps at your first entrance that he was one of those lovable, nervous little men . . ."

I never finished the sentence. Welch simply leaped from his chair.

"My God!" he cried; "then that entrance of mine must be all wrong."

You see the point of view? Not for one moment did he imply, not for one moment did it enter his head, that my criticism might be wrong. The mere fact that any one, no matter who, even the biggest fool in the universe, could gather such an impression from his entrance was enough for him. His point of view was that it was up to him to play Hopkinson in such a way that there could be no possibility whatever of misconception as to the type of man Hoppy was meant to be.

Now that is a great point of view. No matter what qualities we may possess, the brain which at a whisper of criticism looks

first within itself for the cause of the fault is the brain which is sound throughout.

I remember a similar instance with dear old Hermann Vezin. He had been giving a recital at Steinway Hall, and we came out of the hall together. An exquisite creature in sables came up and gushed all over him.

"Oh, Mr. Vezin, you were wonderful—more wonderful than ever!"

Vezin whisked round to me. "Was I?" he said.

I was only a girl at the time. That did not matter. He wanted to know. Not that Vezin was in any way troubled by over-modesty. He had, as all geniuses must have, an appreciation of his own worth, and on another occasion, when some one said to him:

"Oh! Mr. Vezin, you are one of our greatest English actors!"

He turned quietly to me and said: "Where are the others?"

The knowledge of his own power never hampered Vezin's careful work. In fact that work suffered from over-study on his part, for his fault was that he would theorize about acting instead of trusting to instinct.

Work up technique by all means, but when you are playing forget your technique. Unless you can do this it has not become second nature to you. Theorist as he was, Vezin could do this when he liked, and what is more, he had the knack of imparting technique to others. He was a splendid teacher, and singularly free from personal mannerisms; therefore one could learn of him for years without fear of picking up tricks which would give the training away. He was painstaking to a degree. I heard him badger one poor pupil for a whole hour in the vain effort to get a certain inflection out of him. At the end of the lesson he said to the pupil:

"That will do for to-day. Come at eleven to-morrow."

"What are we going to do then?" asked the pupil.

"This over again," said Vezin.

Strange to say the next morning the pupil was conspicuous by his absence, nor did he ever come again.

Vezin was immune himself from personal vanity, and it never entered his head that other people could be less stoical. When you

went to him for lessons you never knew what might be your fate. You might think you were lucky if you received your portion of instruction uninterrupted except for the timely comments of his parrot, who had a knack of ejaculating "Scratch me!" at inopportune moments, and if your dramatic efforts affected her too acutely she would say: "Go to the devil!" But if you were not lucky it would be a great deal worse than this, for Vezin had a habit of admitting every one who chanced to call, and often his little room would be quite full of people listening open-eyed to his monotonous reiteration of:

"Hence; home, you idle creatures, get you home;" and your more and more inane attempts to copy him. They all stared at you with a pitiless stare. Nobody seemed in the least interested in you. All they wanted was for you to hurry up and finish your lesson and be gone, which you would have been thankful to do, but Vezin continued inexorably till the full hour was up.

His methods were wonderful. He was great on the art of pause, and it is the keynote of expression. A word doubles in im-

portance by aid of that little halt in front of it, which serves to pick it out from the rest of the sentence. Another of his great points was constant variety.

"A fresh tone, please," he would say, "this is fresh matter."

And so infinite were the changes of his own wonderful voice that he seemed capable of producing new intonations as a conjuror produces rabbits from a silk hat.

The pause was not only used by him for emphasis. It was also employed to indicate the birth of a new thought in the brain before it found utterance through the tongue. Yet these pauses never seemed to make his performance slow, for he had an admirable pace, and nothing which adds to the life-like effect of the performance ever seems to waste time upon the stage.

Vezin had great control over his breath and always advocated the practice of breathing exercises with the care and attention that an opera singer would devote to the subject. I personally hold that breathing exercises should be used with some amount of caution. I remember once I went to take a class at a

school, following another teacher whose zeal for breathing exercises must have somewhat outrun her discretion, for when I asked the pupils to show me what they had been doing they immediately started to inhale, and they inhaled and they inhaled and they inhaled until veins stood out on their foreheads and they began to grow purple in the face. For my part, I think that if you inhale gently through the nose, hold the breath while you mentally count four and then gently exhale; then inhale again through the nose, hold the breath again, then, as you exhale, count aloud "One, two, three, four, five, six," holding the breath between each number counted, you will acquire quite as much control over the breath as if you tried more complicated exercises, because the little stoppage of the breath between the speaking of each number is the part of the exercise which is most valuable. It teaches you to keep hold of the breath you have taken, using it or not using it at will, and this is the great secret of breath control when speaking. It is not essential to take a very deep breath; in fact it is just as bad a fault to take too much as to take too

little, because you don't know how to get rid of the residue, but it is essential to measure the breath you have taken, using for each word just the quantity which is required by the force with which that word is to be spoken, and retaining the breath during any little pause which you may wish to make between the words, should such a pause be necessary before another breath can be taken.

Suppose, for instance, at a dramatic moment the striking of a clock was of vital importance, and one of the characters had to say: "The clock struck one." To say:

"The clock struck one"

with the breath escaping evenly is not effective. You have to say:

"The clock struck——*ONE.*"

The pause in front of the "one" is the type of pause on which dear old Hermann Vezin laid such stress as a means of giving emphasis to the word which follows. You could not take breath before the word "one"; you could not say:

"The clock struck ᵛ one."

That would be gaspy. You have to say:

"The clock struck——"

and hold the breath during the pause, speaking the word "one" in a loud, decisive voice. If the breath has not been held during the pause there might be insufficient left to enable the word "one" to ring out with the requisite vigor.

I have often said that an actor's intelligence shows in the way he takes his breath, as so much depends on taking it in the right place. You must mentally look ahead, harboring your resources and preparing for what is to come. Both farce and drama depend on the building-up of climax upon climax, and this crescendo must be foreseen and allowed for. If audiences only realized this they might be more generous with their applause. The great scene in *Othello* is often shorn of one of its finest speeches, known in theatrical circles as the "Pontic Sea" speech, because Othellos who play this scene with passion are apt to find it too exhausting. In the old days this speech was almost always omitted. Macready omitted it, and Vezin, who was Macready's rival, was proud of the fact that he could put it in. But he told me that if any audience had failed to give him the round

of applause that he invariably got for the speech that preceded it, he would not have had the power to add the "Pontic Sea" speech. That little pause, while the applause rang forth, gave his lungs just time to recover from the strain of the preceding lines. I notice, however, that all the speeches are given by modern Othellos. Query—is this because they get their applause? Is it because they are physically more vigorous than actors of old; or is it—could it *possibly* be—because they don't put the same passion into the scene, and therefore don't find it so fatiguing? I leave it to my readers to say which.

Welch was always on the look-out for types to mimic, and many a day, when we have been walking along the streets together, he has suddenly clutched my arm and said excitedly: "Agnes—Agnes! Look! Look!" I have looked where he has pointed, and seen some terrible specimen of tramphood shambling down a side street. Off would go Welch in pursuit. On would trudge our quarry, and on would we follow, up court and down alley, round posts and often into

pubs, until Welch had steeped himself in the peculiarities of his unsuspecting model. Then we would proceed at a more leisurely pace to the theater, where he would spend the next hour shambling up and down, dictating letters in the vilest Cockney, interspersed with swear words.

He believed in studying humanity from the life, and at one period he spent a large portion of his time at the Marylebone Police Court. I suspect also that not a little of his money found its way into the collecting box there.

He was curiously affected by the parts he played, and while studying them seemed to be obsessed by them to such an extent that he almost became the very man. The whole tone of his daily life reflected this obsession, so that any one seeing him for the first time when he was rehearsing a Cockney part might be excused for saying, as one woman said to me, "I am very disappointed in James Welch. He is such a little Cockney." As a matter of fact, Welch was an extremely cultured man, a great reader, who loved

beautiful words with the love of a Robert Louis Stevenson.

I have always had a great admiration for the dramatic temperament of Miss Marie Tempest. She assumes no pose and never seems over-driven with work, maintaining her mental equilibrium. As an artist she falls instinctively into "the skin of her part," and her work is earnest and accurate. In all the time during which I have worked for her I have never met with anything but kindness, and she has shown me in every way delightful consideration. If sympathy be, as I think it is, a necessary quality of genius, she has it unmistakably. She, again, is most intelligent about her work, and very inventive of detail, which, however, she is careful to keep in its proper place as subordinate to the balance and effect of the play as a whole.

It is rather difficult to describe her method. She does not pose as one who has devoted great thought to her work, but yet at each rehearsal she adds some delicate and subtle point until the picture of her whole performance is filled in and finished. One would

never say of her work that it had been thought out; one has the feeling that it "just growed." Yet in reality it is built up of a wealth of minute detail. I know no actress, either here or abroad, who can represent a conflict of two emotions as Marie Tempest can. Her work is above all things subtle, and as such is deserving of careful study by dramatic students.

Ellen Terry's methods are always spontaneous. I have seen her play the same parts time after time, but I have never seen her play any duologue scene twice with exactly the same movements and positions on the stage. So far as details are concerned her work is clearly to a certain extent due to the inspiration of the moment, however much thought may have been given to the study of the character itself. For my part, I believe in spontaneity, even in the matter of producing, when it is accompanied by genius. I think that by trusting to the inspiration of the moment one may often get a flashlight thrown on the essentials so illuminating that it more than compensates for any little immaturity in the details.

Many actors need to be taught the whole business of a part. They learn by rote to such an extent that when they are cast for anything important you cannot be sure of the result unless you have the luck to engage also the producer who can give them the coaching they require.

Duse is another actress whose work is spontaneous to a degree, and in the old days she eschewed make-up, with the strange result that she looked a different woman according to whether you saw her close or from afar. I saw her first from the back of the dress circle and thought that she had gray hair, but when I changed my place to the front of the stalls I found that her hair was dark with a curious gray lock right in the front. The absence of make-up was supposed to leave her features a better canvas for facial expression; but as a matter of fact I am rather doubtful whether this was exactly the result attained. Again, those who were very close had an advantage. From a distance the fact that none of the features were made to stand out by the use of cosmetics rendered them all a little indistinct.

For sheer facial expression on the stage, as seen in the glare of the footlights, I think the Pierrot's mask is hard to beat, for the whitened face throws up the reddened mouth and penciled eyes in marked relief, and those features, of course, are the most poignant where facial expression is concerned.

It was Duse who, by her powerful realistic method, opened the eyes of the English to the fact that the footlights are merely a fourth wall. I shall never forget her entrance in *Magda*. When Mrs. Patrick Campbell played the part she stood posed in the doorway, then with stately *mien* advanced. But one was hardly aware that Duse was on the stage before she was right down by the footlights, hugging her little sister in her arms. I remember she played quite a long portion of that first scene sitting in a high-backed chair with her back to the audience, a chair that practically hid her from view.

Her methods on the stage are so spontaneous that you feel sure they are due to instinct, and not to that studied semblance of the unstudied, with which some members of

the Manchester School have made us familiar.

If you can trust your cast, spontaneity is the surest guide; but the "if" is menacing. Since the presentation of a play is the welding together of the work of many human beings, it is usually fairer to have a guiding spirit in the shape of a good producer. That that producer's word must be law goes without saying, otherwise discord would prevail. No producer is worth his salt if his methods are hard and fast. He must know genius when he sees it, and seeing it, must trust it. The late Sir William Gilbert was perhaps the most arbitrary producer ever known. He coached and drilled his company to the smallest detail; yet when he felt that the part he had created was in good hands he stood aside and let the genius of the actor have its way. There is a story told of the late W. H. Kendal. Gilbert had been particularly worrying to him during a rehearsal, and at last Kendal ventured on a remonstrance.

"You don't keep stopping my wife," he said to Gilbert.

"Your wife's an actor," was the emphatic reply.

Many actors are at their worst at rehearsals; others are at their best. Some will rehearse a dramatic scene on the verge of melodrama, and then, when facing an audience, hit just the right note. Others will under-play right to their last limit. Some actors give a wonderful first night and are never so good again. Others need about a month to work into their part. Certain actors have certain peculiarities. When playing *The Gay Lord Quex,* Sir John Hare had a habit, at a particular line in the big scene with Sophy Fulgarney, of picking up a book that lay on the table, turning it in his hand and putting it down again. This action had nothing whatever to do with the play, and the book was merely there to give a natural effect to the table. But one night it so happened that Props forgot to put the book on the table. When Sir John Hare arrived at that line there was no book for him to pick up; his memory failed him, and he had to be prompted. This is a very natural thing to happen, when actors are rehearsed, as they

are nowadays, with all the business cut and dried. It may make for smoothness when everything goes right; but if any little thing goes wrong, it is obvious that this over-careful preparation must lessen the actor's power of resource.

Some producers greatly prefer an actor to wait for the word of command and make no attempt whatever to create a part himself. Welch used to hate this, and when he found that any of his company expected him to settle every movement for them his language became unprintable. He must have been very worrying to his company, for however much he might read a play before he started producing it, he was apt to get fresh inspiration at every fresh rehearsal, with the result that the business was continually being changed. All very well for him, because he could adapt himself to any circumstances and nothing put him out; but an ordeal for the actor whose wit was less ready and whose position in the profession less secure.

Vezin used to declaim against the modern custom of supplying members of the cast merely with their own parts and a few words

to act as cues. He said that it was an insult to the intelligence of an actor not to give him a chance to study his part in connection with the whole play. His own method of study was peculiar. He never deliberately memorized his own lines. He simply read the play through and through and through until he was saturated with it and could have recited the whole thing from beginning to end. His is undoubtedly the ideal method, but Vezin was a man of high ideals, who lived for his art and took it for granted that the welfare of the whole production was the one thing every honorable actor would consider.

I remember being greatly amused one day when, at a rehearsal of *Othello* in which he was playing the Moor, his Emilia happened to be a lady who had recently played the part with a well-known actor-manager. The fun began when it came to the fifth act.

At Emilia's entrance here Vezin stood quietly down R. with his shoulder turned to the audience, facing up stage. Emilia came rushing on to the center of the stage and started her lines:

"O, my good lord, yonder's foul murders done."

"Am I to stand here?" she said.
"Yes," said Vezin.
She proceeded:

"O, the more angel she,
And you the blacker devil!"

"Am I still standing here?" said she.
"Yes," said Vezin.

"My husband? er—Do I remain here?"

"Yes," said Vezin.

"My husband say that she was false?—er —Am I to play it all dead center?"

"Yes," said Vezin, "it is your scene."
Emilia's mouth opened. *Her* scene! With Othello on the stage! Words failed her. But that was Vezin's point of view. He would no more have stolen the position

of advantage on the stage which he felt belonged by rights to another actor than he would have forged a check. It was simply not his idea of common honesty.

I have said that on the English stage we place possibly undue weight on the importance of detail, a fault which the late Sir Henry Irving is supposed to have fostered, but which was developed hot-foot by Sir Herbert Tree. We have one virtue, however, for which I think we received too little credit —we use the whole of our stage, and we use it naturally. This is one reason why action is all important in our plays and why our plays are therefore essentially plays where a graceful, natural carriage and simple but effective use of gesture are very necessary. In France the actors show themselves much more conscious of their audiences. They often stand in line and face the audience. The action takes place to the front of the stage and is subordinated to the speaking of the words. This is the case, again, in America, where the producers keep the actors well down stage, seldom setting a room as we do, but usually having a center arch into a second

room or a vista down a garden or some other device which will fill the stage and give a broad effect while keeping the actual room in which the action is concentrated narrowed down to the front.

Line writing is highly esteemed in America, and this method of producing enables the actors to speak their lines with great distinctness. The effect is not so restful or so absolutely true to life as that which we achieve, but for a certain style of play it is possibly more effective. I believe myself that one of the reasons why American plays are not always such successes here as in their native land is that the English company does not adapt itself to the subtle differences of method required for the American business.

Holland has a very painstaking theater, and Germany, when handling classics, a sense of grandeur which often becomes stereotyped. Norway is curiously homely, and the monosyllabic Norse tongue has a fascinating, childish candor of its own. Spain has abandon and a certain rough fire which at times degenerates into the frank *naïveté* of the Middle Ages. But Italy, to my mind, holds

the palm. Her stage has the innate spontaneity of a race whose very life is drama. It is as candid as the Norwegian, as witty as the French, as classic as the German, as natural as the English, as ingenious as the American, and has, withal, a characteristic fire. In Italy the great play is a thing of comparatively common occurrence, but, then, so is the great actor. Where we leave off they begin.

CHAPTER XI

HOW TO SET ABOUT THE WORK OF GETTING AN ENGAGEMENT

GET to know people. It is difficult to make one's way on the stage unless one has a friend at Court to help one on. Beware of advertisements. Beware of all agents except the few who are guaranteed by those wise in the profession. Traps for the unwary are manifold; and very serious may be the fate of the tenderfoot who gets into wrong hands.

A good amateur dramatic company is not only a useful mode of training, but is often a very straight road on to the stage. Especially helpful is the work undertaken by many amateur societies of providing entertainments for mission-halls at the East End of London, as on these make-shift stages one is denied the help of scenes and properties, and has to make believe. Unforeseen hitches will occur, and it brings out the resources of

a young amateur to have to grapple with these conditions.

I remember once, when a little A.D.C. which I had formed among my pupils was performing at an East End Mission Hall, an amusing incident occurred. We were playing Sydney Grundy's drama, *A Fool's Paradise,* and I was taking the part of the woman who poisons her husband. At the end of the play I get caught by the Doctor, who declares that there is poison in the draught I have poured out for my husband. I cry out "This is not poison—see!" and drink the draught myself; then with a laugh of defiance make my way in stately fashion to die discreetly "off," in the wings. Well, after my mocking curtsey I laid my hand upon the door only to find, to my horror, that somebody had bolted it on the outside. I started my laugh all over again, and gravitated to the door R. To my dismay, that was bolted too; so with a final "ha! ha!" of mockery I fled across the stage and as a last resource tried the door L. *That also was bolted!* So I had to go through my death agonies in front of the audience and die C. This was all very well;

in fact I rather enjoyed it. But unfortunately, my husand in the play had not been listening, and when he now made his entrance, he fell over my feet and said "Oh, I beg your pardon! What are you doing there?" and the scene ended to yells of appreciative laughter from the back benches.

We often had much to put up with at these little mission halls, and our audiences, no doubt, still more! But that we got a great deal of useful experience is proved by the fact that every member of that little company is either doing well on the stage—or has made a good marriage!

Of course, the easiest way to get an introduction to the stage is to go to a good teacher, and by the excellence of your work inspire that teacher with the firm belief that your future success is going to be a good advertisement for him. He will then see to it for you. Certain agents, of course, are thoroughly worth while if you can only persuade them that you yourself are worth while. That is the trouble. It is no good telling them so. They are all quite used to hearing that. And it is no good trying to give them

a specimen of your quality in the shape of a recitation. They simply won't listen to you. The days when a manager casting a play allowed the applicants to recite to him are, in the memory of the oldest of us, as a golden dream. Nowadays a cast is chosen very largely by its appearance, and some authors are even greater sinners in this respect than managers, because they have much less sense of what can be done by make-up. As a matter of fact the appeal of the stage is so essentially an appeal to the eye that appearance is infinitely more important than the ordinary amateur is willing to admit. If a man looks the part he is playing the audience is willing to believe that the whole credit is due to his acting. But if a man does not look that part, his acting has got to be superlative indeed to enable him to overcome the impression his appearance has created.

The casting of a play is such a vital factor in its success or failure that a manager cannot be blamed for being afraid to trust any one whose work in a similar part he has not actually seen; and this is one of the reasons why an actor who has once made a success

in a marked character part will be condemned for the rest of his life to play parts of that type; which sometimes, unfortunately, means that if the part is of a type which is not often found in plays, he will be denied a chance to make good in other lines. This is the reason why certain notable successes have brought in their train years of inaction to the genius which has created them. It is a crying evil, and one of which every actor stands in dread.

Since appearance is so important on the stage, it is obvious that the actor who wishes to get on must bear it ever in mind; and many a youngster has to deny himself what he would far rather have for the sake of keeping always a good appearance. Our wardrobe is the specter that haunts our lives; and when trying for a first engagement it is advisable that the details of dress should be carefully chosen. By this I do not mean that you must dress extravagantly, and certainly I do not mean that you must dress exaggeratedly. The days have long gone by when the actress who turned up in the gay plumage of the *demi-monde* was the actress who was chosen. In the West End, at any

rate, it is the tailor-made girl who gets the first chance. Her clothes must not only be well made, they must be tasteful and refined, and she must wear them as if she were in the habit of wearing good clothes, and as if she belonged to that class of society where good clothes are so much a matter of everyday life that we have ceased to be conscious of them. Hats, gloves and shoes are all important. A manager will take in every little detail because he is used to considering the effect of detail on the stage.

It is always a mistake to apply for an engagement when there is nothing definitely going. Even though one may have a letter of introduction to a manager, it is far better to keep it until one has found out that that manager is about to cast a play either for London or for a tour and has certain parts vacant. In this case try to find out what these parts are and the type of appearance that will be required for them, and choose your dress accordingly. A woman has a special advantage this way, as by the height of her heels and hat she can succeed in conveying an impression of being short or tall.

Be very careful how you make up when applying for an engagement. It is not always necessary to make-up at all. If the complexion is fresh, Nature unaided will create the best impression. But when make-up is used, let it be discreetly used, bearing in mind the fact that what looks well on the stage will look *outré* in daylight. So let the touching-up be done with discretion.

We will suppose that the initial difficulty of getting information that a cast is about to be chosen has been overcome, and that the aspirant has applied for an appointment and has received a reply, naming the hour at which he or she is to call. It is useless to turn up without an appointment. It is worse than useless to besiege a manager with constant applications for appointments which he is not likely to grant; as if he once forms the impression that you are a nuisance he will not see you at all.

We are supposing, however, that he has consented to see you, and that you have received a card telling you to call at the theater at such and such an hour. You turn up at the stage door and show your card to the stage

door-keeper. Be very nice to the stage door-keeper; he is a power in the land. Don't try to tip him at the wrong moment, and don't, whatever you do, let him see that you are trying to be nice. Don't condescend. Whatever his original social standing may have been, he is by now at least your equal, and probably very much your superior, in that greatest of all sciences—knowledge of human nature! I have many friends who are stage door-keepers, and one of my most valued friends is a stage carpenter. Never have I felt prouder in my life then when the property man at the Ambassadors Theater on the first night of my management there said: "May I shake hands, Miss Platt? I have never known rehearsals go without a cross word before!"

Apropos of the stage carpenter, Charlie by name, and a shrewd North countryman, it was once brought home to me that he was really, as he often humorously remarked, one of the most important members of the company. He happened to be away one afternoon. On that occasion none of the doors worked; the stage was set in the wrong way;

the stage cloth rucked up, and one of the actors tumbled. Something went wrong with the property piano, and at the end of the performance the star was in such a temper that I had my eyes opened as never before to the wealth of the English language. However good a cast, however perfect the management, it is not too much to say that the success of the play can stand or fall by the head carpenter, who, moreover, can give a novice many a useful tip and prove indeed a friend in need, or the reverse, as the case may be.

There is a story told of Wybert Rousby. When playing *King Lear* once he fell foul of the stage hands and abused them roundly for not making the thunder loud enough. The next night, when the scene on the heath commenced, he was more furious than ever, for there was no thunder at all. When, however, he opened his mouth to deliver the big speech,

"Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks,"

he found that there was no occasion to complain of lack of thunder! The audience enjoyed that performance a great deal more

than he did, but not quite in the right spirit.

I feel as if I were wandering from my point, but really I am not doing so, for whatever other advice, good or bad, this little book may try to give, it should at least contain these words of wisdom: "If you want to get on on the stage, *be nice to every one.*"

Now I have quite forgotten where I left my aspirant. Waiting at the stage door, I think. Dear me! That reminds me of once, long ago—no, not so *very* long ago—when I went down to Wyndham's to see James Welch. In the stage door-keeper's hutch sat a fireman. He did not know me and he refused to let me pass. I told him I had an appointment. He said:

"Where's your letter?"

I had not got a letter, so he snorted and resumed his reading.

After five minutes I said again: "I really have an appointment."

He just snorted and resumed his reading.

"I really think Mr. Welch must be waiting for me."

He snorted and resumed his reading.

After another five minutes I tried him in

another language—two, three, four other languages. He only snorted and resumed his reading.

Then a small boy came along.

"Guv'nor says he is expecting a young lady. Will you please show her into his dressing-room and ask her to wait?"

The fireman snorted and resumed his reading. So I said:

"If you please, I think *I* am the young lady."

He laid down his paper and looked me up and down.

"*Young* lady!" he said, "*YOUNG* LADY!!" and snorted and resumed his reading.

Until Welch himself came along to fetch me I had to remain outside.

However, this sort of thing does not often happen, and it wouldn't have happened to me then if I had had the sense to turn up in decent clothes; but as it was a filthy day and as I knew Welch well, it did not occur to me to dress for the guardian of the portal.

Well, we will suppose that you get past the stage door-keeper and are shown, after wait-

ing not more than two hours and thirty-five minutes, into the manager's room. He will probably be very nice to you, especially if he does not mean to engage you. Make up your mind before you go in that you will only be allowed to speak three words, and that those three words must be carefully chosen. When it comes to the point you are sure to forget what you have decided to say; but provided you remember that you must say as little as possible that won't matter. Never forget that managers are very busy people, and that to win your way into their good books you must be an adept at the art of tabloid conversation. Don't tell them what other people think of you. Directly they look at you they will know what they think, and that's the only thing that matters to them. Don't make objections to anything they say. Don't give them any chance to think that you are going to be a nuisance, because a manager never tolerates any one whom he thinks is going to be a nuisance, and he has a little habit of thinking that most people are going to be a nuisance. Unfortunately, he has only too often good reason

for thinking so. Remember, if you are nervous, he is nervy. Just stay quiet and let him make up his own mind. If it is in your favor all the better for you; if it is not, and you waste his time trying to argue him into engaging you, you are only prejudicing your chances for another occasion. Smile, look willing and able to do anything, and he will come to the conclusion that though, of course, you are no good at all, you may be the sort of person whom he can successfully knock into shape, and if he thinks that he will like you, for, however managers may differ in other ways, I have never known one who did not cherish in his heart the belief that he could coach a stone to act if he only liked to try. He probably could! To the born teacher there is nothing in this world so enjoyable as teaching, and the quality that attracts us all is malleability.

Managers are not running philanthropic institutions, and the one thing that is not likely to melt their hearts is a long history of an actor's personal troubles. Success on the stage is a question of magnetism, and when we are weighed down with woe we are not

magnetic. A manager wants a cast which will induce an audience to come to his theater again and again, and he knows that the self-centered nature is not the type which attracts. If you can leave on him the impression that you are interesting he may give you a chance; but it is the reverse of probable that he will find anything to interest him in a narrative of your personal affairs. When choosing the cast of a new play his thoughts are all engrossed with his own affairs, and he instinctively resents any attempt to draw him away from the matter in hand. Keep quiet. Let him look at you and form his own conclusions, and only answer when you are spoken to.

Well, now, we will suppose that you have followed up instructions to the letter and that you have been engaged. You will be given a contract, which you will sign after you have read it. It ought to be the standard contract of the Actors' Trade Union, and probably will be, and as you yourself are about to become a member of the Actors' Trade Union as soon as eligible, this, of course, will be quite agreeable to you. We

will suppose that you are engaged to understudy. You will be given a typescript of your part, which you will probably read through. It will consist of your own lines with just a word or two of the previous lines as cue, and will not give you any idea of the play. You will have to wait till rehearsals commence to find out what it is all about. This does not matter, for it is never advisable to study a part until after the first rehearsal as, if you have formed pre-conceived ideas of how that part should be played, it is sometimes difficult to throw these ideas aside and adapt yourself to the ideas of the producer. Never try to commit a line to heart until you have been told your position on the stage when that line is spoken, so that the business of the stage may be impressed upon your mind in connection with the line when the line is studied. Always carry a pencil to rehearsal, as the play will be altered during the rehearsal, and every alteration must be carefully entered in the typescript, together with notes of the positions and business. Exactitude in these matters is important. A producer will sometimes change his mind and at

one rehearsal will alter a position which has been settled at some previous rehearsal. This cannot be helped, as it is very difficult to judge of the exact value of a line until the play is beginning to shape, and often little alterations are necessary to keep the balance true. It is a mistake to grumble, as sometimes the most important improvements have been made in a play at the last minute, and everything that is for the good of the play is for the good of every one connected with that play. Never forget what has been so often insisted upon in these pages, namely, that your own success depends entirely on that of the whole production.

Certain actors have a habit of grumbling in the wings during the progress of rehearsal, of commenting on the work of the producer and suggesting what they think would be improvements. This whispering is very annoying to the producer, and a spirit of grumbling once set going in a cast may cause an infinitude of mischief. Don't listen to these people. If you are new to the profession they will try to get hold of you, as they are usually vain, and they will think that you,

being a novice, will be easy to impress. Beware of them. However intent on his work a producer may seem he has eyes at the back of his head and ears in every nerve of his body; and though you may be standing right away in a corner, he will know what you are doing and make a black mark in his mind against you. Always watch a rehearsal quietly and attentively. If other members of the cast speak to you, be polite, but do not encourage conversation. If you do you will lose the advantage of the finest training you can have—that of watching the shaping of a play and the coaching of a company.

One of my pupils, Miss Gladys Parnell, got a remarkable chance, simply because of her attention at rehearsals. She had had no experience, but I asked Arthur Bourchier to give her a chance, and he very kindly offered her a "walk-on" and the understudy of a small part in *The Morals of Marcus,* which was going on at the Garrick. Miss Parnell was so attentive at rehearsals that she attracted the attention of the stage manager, Sydney Valentine, and when the first tour was sent out he asked her if she would like

to go with it, to play the small part she had understudied in town and understudy the leading lady in the part of Carlotta. She accepted, and it so happened that the actress playing Carlotta was wanted for a leading part in town before the tour finished, and Miss Parnell, who was then only sixteen and who had never been on any stage before, was given Carlotta to play for the rest of the tour. She was, therefore, playing a leading part on tour before she had been on the stage three months, simply because she showed by her quiet attention at rehearsals that she was really earnest about her work.

I can tell you another story which is really rather funny. I wrote to James Welch about another pupil of mine—also a novice. I asked if he would give her the part of Rowena in *When Knights were Bold* on tour. Of course he replied that he would see her with pleasure. She went to the theater, accompanied by her mother, a dainty lady of aristocratic bearing and exquisite snow-white hair. It so happened that the girl stopped in the passage to pick up a glove she had dropped, and her mother entered Welch's

room alone. He looked a little surprised, but he said: "I hear I am to give you the part of Rowena. Here it is. Of course, anyone Miss Platt sends. . . ." The girl came in a moment later and explained. Jimmy told me afterwards that his relief was boundless!

CHAPTER XII

. . . AND HOW TO BEHAVE WHEN IT IS GOT!

IT is not only your work upon the stage which helps you to get on in the profession. To an actor the art of living is every bit as important as the art of acting. As a rule actors talk too much; our hours of work are so different from the hours of the ordinary citizen that we are apt to find ourselves in our free moments thrown almost entirely on our fellow professionals for company. Moreover, our work itself gives many opportunities for gossip because it is composed so largely of intervals and waits. Then, when we tour, there are train journeys, and one cannot be thrown with a certain set of people for weeks or months at a time without becoming somewhat intimate with them, especially if one has to share a dressing-room. All these things bring about a number of rapid and often transitory friendships, similar to the intimacy, so quickly ended, of nurse and patient.

Just as illness makes us ready to open our hearts, so the nervous tension of rehearsals and the close quarters of life at a theater—to say nothing of the exhilaration produced by the actual performances—tend to rouse in us a somewhat abnormal mood, in which discretion is often conspicuous by its absence. Though the old social ban upon our profession has been very greatly removed, we are still a race apart, and we have a little habit of absorbing ourselves so much in our work that we are apt at times to be dull company for those who are not in the profession. We talk a language of our own, and as we are haunted by the need of getting fresh and fresh engagements, we cannot keep the thought of "shop" out of our minds. We pick up every little bit of gossip about the stage because our chances may depend on having all inside knowledge. All this is a sufficient incentive to gossip, accentuated by the fact that as we are continually seeking fresh engagements, we are always waiting about to see managers; and while we wait we talk. While we wait for our scenes to come on at rehearsal we are only too apt to talk, and when we leave

rehearsal we usually wend our way to some professional club where we talk again. In fact we talk a great deal too much, and one of the most important rules of conduct for the novice entering the profession is to learn to control his tongue. Remember that whatever you say will be repeated, and that whenever it is repeated it will be exaggerated, and your name will be attached to it every time, so that you may some day have to answer, not only for what you have said but for what some one has said that some one has said you have said. Yet it does not do to seem uncommunicative. For an actor to get a reputation of being stand-offish is fatal; and we owe so much to the goodwill of our fellow professionals that it is not too much to say that such behavior would be ungrateful. You must be cordial and sincere; you must feel a genuine interest in your companions, and you must respond to their interest in yourself. Talk therefore, and talk sincerely, and talk frankly; but never give your inner heart away, and, above all, never give information about another which that other would not wish you to give. There! I am afraid that sounds

rather preachy, but all who are old in the profession will agree with me that it is good advice, and it is much easier said than done.

I have said—Be frank, and be grateful for the interest that others take in you. But I am afraid I must be very cynical and add—don't believe all they say! I remember the case of a little friend of mine who had been understudying and was suddenly called upon to play a part at a moment's notice. She was somewhat new to the stage and nervous. She had hardly entered the theater when one of the other girls in the company descended on her with a hearty invitation to share a bottle of champagne. "You will need it, my dear. It will steady your nerves." A few minutes after, when she was wandering from her friend's dressing-room to her own, she was again stopped and a glass of port wine was held out to her. Next she was given half a bottle of stout, and she was then offered a whisky and soda, while her dresser insisted on her taking Wincarnis. The result was that her performance made up in audacity for what it lacked in coherence. And her make-up! The other girls had given

her advice about it and she had taken it all! Her face looked like a rainbow seen through a spotted veil.

If you have a particularly telling bit of business, ten to one somebody will say, "I shouldn't do that, my dear." If you are a pretty girl you are sure to be told that your make-up is unbecoming. On the other hand, when you have steered your way through these pitfalls and have got upon the stage, you will find that, understudy though you be, the principals of the company will do all in their power to assist you. They will whisper your lines; they will cover your mistakes; they will hearten you with words of encouragement; and when the ordeal is over, they will give you their cordial congratulations. More than this, if they can put in a good word for you with that management or any other they will do so *con amore*.

Success on the stage depends much on personality; and experience goes to show that success comes more surely to those who are not always trying to snatch it. Go quietly about your work and never commit a breach of etiquette, for though we are considered

Bohemians, we have our rules of caste, which must be stringently observed. Don't force yourself on the attention of an actor of higher standing than your own. Wait. If there is anything in you worth noticing he will notice it for himself and seek you out without your having to seek him. I have seen a manager brush aside a crowd of clamorous girls as if they were flies, and pick out the one who stayed quietly by saying nothing. I have seen a leading lady smile sweetly every night for a week in answer to the voluble greeting of an understudy who accompanied her to the door of her dressing-room paying her compliments and pressing attentions on her. But at the end of the week the star said to her dresser: "Keep that girl out of my way." Don't intrude where you are not wanted. It is a mistake.

Of course the social side of life is important to us, because if we have many friends we bring a certain following to see us when we are playing, and this is a clear asset. Many a play is put on the stage with insufficient financial backing, and if this play is not an immediate success its fate may de-

pend upon the nucleus of an audience brought by the social connection of its cast. If it can steer through its first weeks without financial disaster it may develop into a success; but those first weeks are a ticklish time for almost every play, and it is often useful to have a little private interest which will help to fill the house during that period. An actor cannot afford to live too retired a life. He must achieve a certain measure of popularity both on and off the stage, and for this purpose it is well that he should belong to certain useful and influential clubs. He must also know how to behave in any class of society, and to do this it is as well that he should acquire the habits of society, and especially an acquaintance with its latest fads and shibboleths. On the other hand, excess of all kinds is greatly to be deplored, because, apart from any moral reason, he will soon find that that sort of thing blunts his more delicate perceptions and renders him insensitive to those fine touches and subtle distinctions on which the artistic value of his work depends.

Of course it is essential for an actor to look after his health, because his work is of

a kind which tells upon the nerves. It is as important to observe sound laws of hygiene with reference to your daily life, as it is to keep control of your nerves with reference to the work itself. Argument is apt to run high with regard to how far you should let yourself go when playing a dramatic scene. One school will say that an artist must always "feel" what he is doing, and another will maintain that the best work is done by the man who, though realizing the emotional value of the scene he is playing, never abandons himself to that emotion, but simply simulates it. It seems to me that either extreme would be equally inartistic. An actor who believes that by lashing himself into a state of hysteria he can achieve a great emotional effect is only too apt to take the leap from the sublime to the ridiculous, and by losing control of himself lose also his power of conveying to others what he wishes to express. James Welch, one of the greatest tragic actors I have even seen, when rehearsing for "The Hooligan" or any other emotional part, would come along to my rooms and go over the lines until he had got so accustomed to

them by constant repetition that he could speak them without having his utterance impeded by sobs. I have known him, when first reading aloud scenes of a pathetic nature, stop with the tears running down his cheeks, quite unable to continue speaking. His own feeling was so great that it defeated its purpose. He had to conquer this, but he remembered it, and when he had learnt to control it, his memory of it enabled him to reproduce the effect of feeling. Of course the intensity of our feeling on the stage varies very much with our temperament, but I do not think it follows that an actor need be wrung to the heartstrings by the scene he is playing so long as he has realized its full emotional value when first studying the part. His control of the technique of his art will enable him to reproduce sufficient actual emotion to ensure a result that is artistic and sincere. It is often those who talk the most who feel the least, and I am not inclined to think that hysteria can ever take the place of emotion. One seldom sees deep feeling sincerely conveyed upon the stage, because it is only great natures who understand it, and

great natures are rare. When an artist like Duse lifts her head and *looks* the anguish of a broken heart, we don't need sobs and pants and gasps and cries. Her eyes alone convey something beyond words.

Macready was presumably a great actor, but it is not necessary to adopt his method of marching up and down, up and down, in the wings like a caged lion, working himself up into a state of nervous excitement before he burst upon the stage. That sort of thing is gone. If the power of a scene is not sufficient to awaken in you the right mood directly you enter upon it, you are no actor. But, of course, you must dedicate yourself to great work by avoiding any foolish waste of nervous energy.

It is a mistake for an actor to fuss about his work or think it necessary to stimulate his nerves unnaturally. Nervousness seems a necessary adjunct of artistic ability, and, for my part, I think it a pleasing one. My heart goes out to the nervous temperament, especially when it is accompanied by real power. I remember driving to Covent Garden with Miss Perceval Allen when she was singing

Brunhilde in *The Ring.* As we drew near the theater and saw the queues waiting she clutched my hand and said: "Are all those people waiting to hear me sing, dear?" in the tone of a frightened child. It is the right spirit, and, whether acknowledged or not, I think it is the spirit in which every artist faces his work. But to assume the *pose* of nerves, to call "temperament" an excuse for irritability, erratic behavior and self-indulgence, is simply to cut the throat of one's own genius. Be yourself; don't talk about yourself. Don't try to impress other people with the fact that you are something apart from the common herd, because if you do, they will simply dislike you for it, and when they get a chance of finding fault with you, they will make the most of it.

I remember hearing a pretty story. At a well-known theatrical agent's in New York there were a crowd of actresses assembled, talking, posing, giving themselves airs, recounting their triumphs, hinting at their admirers. The door of the inner room opened, and the greatest of American managers appeared there. Every one stopped chatter-

ing and pushed forward, eager to attract his eye. Taking no notice of the finely dressed *poseuses,* he beckoned with his finger to a quiet little woman who had been sitting silent in the corner. She rose and went into his private room. She was Clara Morris, and a few weeks later all New York rang with her name. She became the greatest actress America has ever had, and I believe she owed her first chance largely to the fact that she made no attempt to assert herself, having so real a personality of her own that its quiet power made itself felt without the need for any assertion. If quietness be backed by power it is the most telling quality an actor can possess. Critics call it restraint.

But the power must be innate. Young actors sometimes shrink from anything effective on the stage from the fear that it may be melodramatic. The gist of the whole matter lies in this: that if you have to assume an emotion and lash yourself into an effect, that effect is bound to seem melodramatic because it is forced; but if you have a temperament which is capable of deep feeling you can express it without conscious effort, be-

cause your face and eyes will express it for you. Husband your resources. Don't strike the top note too soon, or you get no climax. The greater your control over your own nerve, the greater is the suggestion of real feeling. Nerves and feeling are not only two different things; they are diametrically opposed to one another. The man who is nerve-ridden sees everything with a twist. A steady judgment is essential in any art, but it is peculiarly so on the stage, where individual effort can have no real value unless sustained by the balance and proportion of the whole. Of all artists the actor is the last who can afford to waste his self-control.

Still less can he afford to run the risk of getting a "swelled head." On the contrary, he must always be his own most drastic and unbiased critic. Talent is, after all, a small thing. So many of us have talent nowadays, and yet so few of us do anything worth doing. We are apt to cry out that this is because the world is hard on us; that we have not had a fair opportunity, and so on, and so on. Any excuse will serve so that we do not blame ourselves. I am not saying that there are no

cases in the world which such excuses fit justly enough; but I do honestly believe that as a rule the explanation must be sought not in our circumstances but in ourselves. It is not enough to have talent; we must have perseverance, energy and grit. Whatever success we achieve it must seem little to us because in our own minds we must always be comparing our work with our ideal.

I want to close this book with a story which I heard long ago and have never forgotten, and I hope never shall forget. It is told of Talma, the great French actor of the time of the Revolution. One night, when he had been playing one of his famous parts, some friends who came behind to see him afterwards said to him:

"You were greater than ever to-night."

"Oh no," he said, "I am not satisfied. I don't do what I want to do with that last act. Come and see me to-morrow. I will try to be better to-morrow."

And on the morrow he was dead.

I can think of no better prayer to carry in your heart all your life long than that your work may be better every day!